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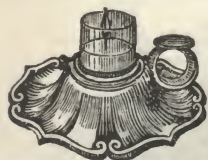
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to which we look for success, with that commonly known as the Best, and if ours be not the better, we are content that all our assertions be considered vain and empty; and so convinced are we of the superior quality of this widely approved good Coffee, that we are satisfied to stand or fall by the result.

To enable the public to prove as much as possible, without tasting the Coffee, the truth of what we have just stated, we will endeavour to show the present market value of some of the principal sorts, as space will not permit us mentioning many, and we will add the price at which we are in the habit

### OF SELLING RETAIL.

	Price per cwt. for Raw Coffee.		British duty.	Selling price at "Number One," for roused Coffee.			
				At per cwt.		At per pound.	
	s.	s.		s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
JAMAICA, ordinary to middling	28	70	4d and 5 per cent.	81 0	144 8	or 0 9	to 1 3½
Good middling to fine qualities ..	75	130	4d and 5 per cent.	149 0	224 0	" 1 4	" 2 0
CEYLON, ordinary to low middling	40	58	4d and 5 per cent.	107 4	180 8	" 0 11½	" 1 2
Middling to fine plantation .....	60	96	4d and 5 per cent.	133 0	177 4	" 1 2½	" 1 7
BERBICE and DEMERARA .....	30	80	4d and 5 per cent.	88 8	156 4	" 0 9½	" 1 4½
DOMINICA and ST. LUCIA .....	30	75	4d and 5 per cent.	133 0	151 8	" 0 9½	" 1 4½
MOCHA .....	50	100	6d and 5 per cent.	144 8	224 0	" 1 3½	" 2 0
COSTA RICA .....	33	60	6d and 5 per cent.	121 4	156 4	" 1 1	" 1 4½
JAVA .....	36	54	6d and 5 per cent.	128 4	140 4	" 1 1½	" 1 4
CUBA, &c. &c. ....	37	80	6d and 5 per cent.	128 4	182 0	" 1 1½	" 1 7½

By the above list it will be noticed that we supply the public retail not only

### AT WHOLESALE PRICES,

but **AT MERCHANTS' PRICES**, which, being ourselves merchants, we are enabled to do and give them every advantage. This is the principle on which our business was based, and which has already met with such gratifying and remunerating success, for prosperity and public favour has hitherto attended, and we respectfully hope will ultimately crown our great undertaking, the object of which has been to bring the growers and producers of, we may now say, the necessities of life in direct communication with the consumers, more particularly for the great benefit of the latter.

The visitors to London are fearlessly assured, that they may save a considerable portion of their railway expenses by purchasing Coffees as well as Teas

### AT NUMBER ONE, SAINT PAUL'S CHURCHYARD,

which is the very centre of England's Metropolis, and a position more easily identified than any in LONDON.

## DAKIN AND COMPY., TEA MERCHANTS.

AGENTS WANTED.





## PARASOLS.

IN returning thanks for the very great patronage they have received, W. & J. SANGSTER beg to call the attention of Ladies to an improvement in Parasols, which they have registered under the title of the Indian.

This invention consists of an invisible band of elastic material, which, by contracting when the Parasol is closed, keeps it so at the will of the wearer.

Every lady well knows that the silk of a Parasol is cut before it is fairly worn out, by the friction of the ring, which has hitherto been indispensable on account of the inconvenience attending bands and clasps of all descriptions.



SANGSTERS, PATENTEES OF THE SYLPHIDE PARASOL,

140, REGENT STREET; 10, ROYAL EXCHANGE; & 94, FLEET STREET.

E. P. DOUDNEY & SON, City Clothing Establishment, 49, Lombard-st.

## Reform your Tailors' Bills !!!

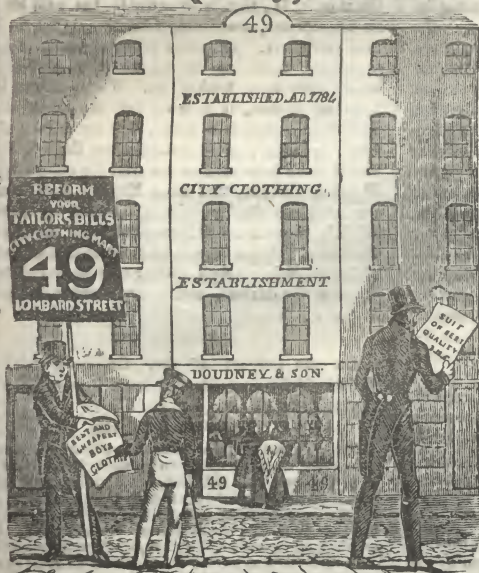
NOBLEMEN and GENTLEMEN visiting the SHOW-ROOMS and inspecting the IMMENSE STOCK OF FIRST - QUALITY GOODS, AT THE

## CITY CLOTHING ESTABLISHMENT,

49, LOMBARD-STREET,

Will prove that a **GOOD Fit, GOOD Quality, and GOOD Taste**, are to be obtained at **Unparalleled Low Prices!**

**Suit of best Quality, New Colors & Patterns, £3 12 6.**



Superfine Dress Coat .....	2	7	6
Extra Imperial Saxony, the best that is made .....	2	15	0
Superfine Frock Coat, Silk facings, 210 0			
Cloth or Cass. Trousers, 17s 6d. to 1 5 0			
Beautiful patterns, Summer Trousers, 10s. 6d. per pair, or 3 pair for 1 10 0			
New Summer Waistcoats, 7s., or 3—1 0 0			
Splendid Silk Valencia Dress			
Waistcoats, 10s. 6d. each, or 3 for 1 10 0			
Morning Coats and Dressing Gowns, 15 0			
Petersham Great Coats, bound, and Silk Velvet Collar .....	2	2	0
Canlet Cloaks, lined all through, 1 1 0			
Cloth Opera Cloaks .....	1	15	0
Spanish Cloaks, a complete circle of nine and a half yards .....	3	3	0
Footman's Suit of Liveries, best Cloth .....	3	3	0
Cloth and Tweed Fishing or Traveling Trousers, 13s. 6d. per pair.			

CONTRACTS BY THE YEAR, originally introduced by E. P. D. and SON, having gained them such Unequalled Fame—their Prices being the Lowest ever offered—they still recommend it to every Gentleman to whom ECONOMY and REGULARITY are objects.

Two Suits per year, Superfine ....	7	7	0
Extra Saxony, the best that is made 8 6 0			
Three Suits per year .....	10	17	0
Extra Saxony, the best that is made, 12 5 0			
Four Suits per year .....	14	6	0
Extra Saxony ditto .....	15	18	0

## BEST & CHEAPEST HOUSE FOR BOYS' CLOTHING.

Skeleton Dresses, 3s. | Tunic & Hussar Suits, 30s. | Camlet Cloaks, 8s. 6d. | Cloth do., 15s. 6d.

**49**

Merchants requiring large Quantities, and Gentlemen and Officers going Abroad, will find, Lombard-st. the Cheapest House in London!

E. P. DOUDNEY & SON, 49, Lombard-street.—Established A. D. 1784.



**BRITISH COLLEGE OF HEALTH,**  
NEW ROAD, LONDON.  
**THE HYGEIAN OR MORISONIAN SYSTEM OF MEDICINE.**

**TRIUMPH OF THE MEDICAL LIBERTY OF THE SUBJECT,**  
**BUT NOT BECAUSE DR. CRONIN HAS BEEN ACQUITTED.**

**Miss COLLIER'S CASE.**

By the medical liberty of the subject, Hygeists understand the ability of all persons of adult age to treat their diseases, and not blindly to trust themselves in the hands of others. It is quite clear that if Miss Collier had not been completely under the thumb of the Doctors, she would still be alive, but as it was, she took the deadly draught prescribed for her (prussic acid, in common use with the Faculty) with *blind confidence!* and almost immediately afterwards fell down dead. No Hygeist could have experienced this, because he knows that all such deadly chemical preparations are *poisons*, and not *medicines*, and he therefore avoids them. It is therefore contended that the case of Miss Collier is a triumphant proof of the necessity for every person to understand this important question; in other words, that the subject may be at liberty to judge for himself in matters of health and disease, and not blindly trust to others.

It is upwards of 20 years since Hygeists have agitated this important question, "*The Medical Liberty of the Subject.*"—That it is one of paramount importance no one can doubt. That it strikes at the interests of the medical body must be evident to all, since it must tend to do away with the attendances or visits of medical practitioners (from which doctors derive their fortunes), by enabling all persons to be their own doctors. Hence the violent opposition of doctors to Hygeists. Within the last few years everything seems to conspire and rise in judgment against the medical profession. The numerous cases of secret poisonings throughout the country effected with what doctors use as medicines, are in point—for such cases they are indirectly responsible. Doctors in their despair have gone to Parliament for what they term *protection*, but their case is so completely interested that they cannot be heard; they say to the Legislature, "Do gag these people and prevent their advertising the truth in the newspapers, and let us alone be the parties to administer physic to the people and *receive the fees.*" This is really what they have the modesty to require. How Sir James Graham met this proposition is known to all the world. How it will be met by any other honest minister may be pretty well guessed. If medicine were what doctors say it is, and that such deadly chemical preparations as prussic acid, strychnine, &c., were necessary to the cure of diseases, where would be the necessity of their asking protection from Parliament? but it is just because the people are beginning to find out that all such deadly preparations have been introduced by the faculty, not with a view to cure diseases, but with the view to rivet their monopoly on a too-confiding public, that that public is now forsaking them on all sides, finding that they can cure themselves better without than with their advice and medicines,—*q.v.* poisons. It therefore comes to this—do away with all these deadly chemical preparations in use by

doctors, and there is nothing to prevent "The Medical Liberty of the subject," which Hygeists contend for. Let there be no poisons left in the way of the people—at present no one is safe—our lives are in the hands of the chemist, and chemistry has been most falsely allied to medicine. In short the only difference between the wilful poisoner and the doctor is only a question of a few grains or drops!!! Should this be so?

Bearing upon this most important question, the British College of Health have much pleasure in placing before the public a representation of the piece of plate presented to JOSEPH WEBB, then of York, but now of the Bell Hotel, Scarborough, Hygeian agent for that place. It is the contribution of 48,000 persons at one penny each, and must prove to even our enemies, the Doctors, that there are many who view with detestation their poisonous trade, and the present dark proceedings of a certain portion of the medical world, to enslave the liberties of mankind in matters of medical belief.

The public have heard of this dreadful case of Miss Collier's, because Dr. CRONIN happens to be a German M.D., that is, because he has paid his fees for his diploma, amounting to £20 or £30, to German professors. If he had paid the fees to English professors, there can be no doubt that the affair would have been hushed up. There might have been an inquest, it is true, but the death would have been assigned, as usual, to some disease of the heart or brain; most certainly, no English doctor would have been sent on his trial for manslaughter. Hygeists contend, that since English M.D.'s make use of these deadly poisons, as well as German M.D.'s, there is no difference between the one and the other. With respect to the question of fees for diplomas, it is solely a matter of pecuniary interest between the doctors, and one for which the public do not care a rush.

On the subject of Dr. CRONIN's trial the British College of Health have received the following letter.

TO MESSRS. MORISON.

SIRS,—I was much amused to see how this case was smoothed over, in order to protect the doctors and their poisons. In this I think there is great crime. Mr. Justice COLERIDGE, an excellent man, put a stop to the case because, as he said, of the uncertainty arising upon the evidence of the chemists. It is quite clear, however, that the unfortunate young lady, Miss Collier, was poisoned by prussic acid, for she fell down on the spot. Of this there can be no doubt, but no one it appears is to be responsible! The only regret that Hygeists can have in the acquittal of Dr. Cronin is, that such a verdict gives a sort of sanction to the poison trade. Many victims to poison will fall in consequence of that verdict. Who can think of the gross contradiction between the chemists on the trial without feelings of disgust? Oh yes, the doctors, their diplomas and poisons, were to be propped up through

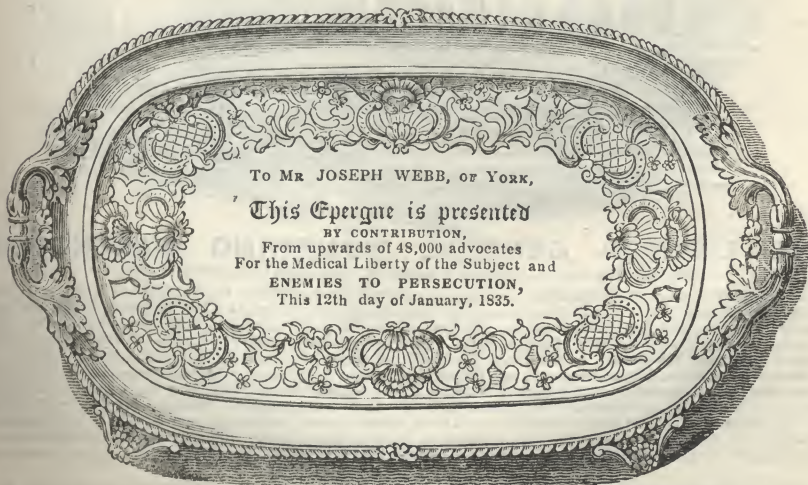


thick and thin. Verily, Sirs, if this is the way in which justice is to be administered, I shall begin to think with Lord Denman, that it is all "a delusion, a mockery, and a snare." One question I wish to ask the public, the Judges among the rest—have they reflected upon the responsibility they incur by sup-

porting a false system of medicine? if they do so in ignorance, they are of course absolved, but if the contrary, they are guilty of one of the greatest crimes in the eyes of God.

Yours, &c.,  
A LOOKER-ON.

PIECE OF PLATE, VALUE £200, PRESENTED TO MR. JOSEPH WEBB,  
(HYGEIAN AGENT TO THE BRITISH COLLEGE OF HEALTH,) OF YORK, BUT  
NOW OF THE BELL HOTEL, SCARBOROUGH, YORKSHIRE.  
MANUFACTURED BY MESSRS. RUNDELL AND BRIDGE, LUDGATE HILL, LONDON.



The BRITISH COLLEGE OF HEALTH feel much pleasure in informing Hygeists that JOSEPH WEBB and his family are in the enjoyment of excellent health. In a letter lately received from that worthy man, he says, "I hope to keep it (the piece of plate) as long as I live, then to go down as an heir-loom to my family."

## THE GENTLEMAN'S REAL HEAD OF HAIR, or INVISIBLE PERUKE.

The principle upon which this Peruke is made is so superior to everything yet produced, that the Manufacturer invites the honour of a visit from the Sceptic and the Connoisseur, that one may be convinced and the other gratified, by inspecting this and other novel and beautiful specimens of the Perruquean Art, at the establishment of the Sole Inventor, F. BROWNE, 47, FENCHURCH-ST.

### F. BROWNE'S INFALLIBLE MODE OF MEASURING THE HEAD.

Round the head in manner of a fillet, leaving the Ears loose .....	As dotted 1 to 1.	Inches.	Eighths
From the Forehead over to the poll, as deep each way as required .....	As dotted 2 to 2.		
From one Temple to the other, across the rise or Crown of the head to where the Hair grows	As marked 3 to 3.		



THE CHARGE FOR THIS UNIQUE HEAD OF HAIR ONLY £1 10s.



Brown 4s. 6d. per bottle.  
Pale 5s. ditto.



3s. per bottle.



10s. per doz. large bottles  
7s. per doz. small ditto  
exclusive of carriage from London.

## "THE STANDARD OF COGNAC,"

WHICH IS THE BEST FOREIGN BRANDY.

**THE PATENT BRANDY, AND THE GENUINE SELTERS WATER,** protected by the Patent Metallic Capsule, the only sure and self-evident safeguard against adulteration, can be obtained throughout the Kingdom at the respective prices above mentioned, or at 7, SMITHFIELD BARS, AND 96, ST. JOHN'S STREET, LONDON.



## THE LONDON GENERAL MOURNING WAREHOUSE,

Nos. 247, 249, and 251, REGENT STREET, two doors from Oxford Street.

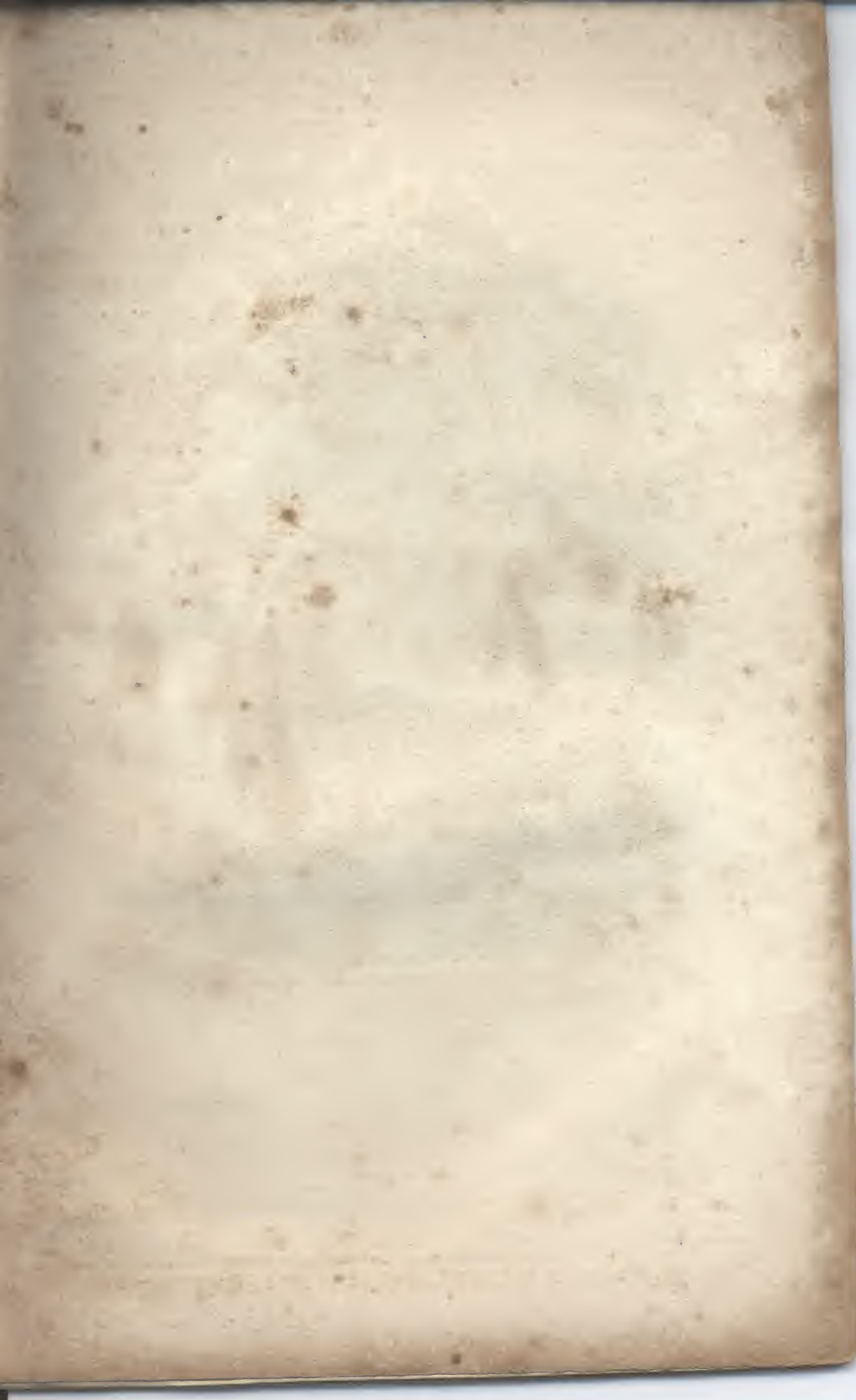
The Proprietors of the above Establishment beg leave to call the attention of the Nobility and Ladies to its great utility. It has ever been a source of inconvenience and regret, on occasions when Mourning Attire has been required, that its purchasers have at such a time been compelled to the painful necessity of proceeding from shop to shop in search of each distinct article of dress. This may be completely obviated by a visit to the London General Mourning Warehouse, where every description of Paramatta, Alapine, Bombasin, Merino, and Crape, for Mourning Dresses, Gloves, Hosiery, and Haberdashery, can be bought on the most reasonable terms, and where everything necessary for a complete Outfit of Mourning may be had, and made up, if required, by experienced Artists, with the strictest attention to taste, elegance, and economy. Widows' and Family Mourning is always kept made up, so that Ladies may by a Note, descriptive of Mourning required (either for themselves or household), have it forwarded to them in Town or Country immediately. Silks for slight or Complimentary Mourning, Printed Muslin Dresses, Mousseline de Laines, Barèges, and Evening Dresses, in the greatest variety.

### THE MILLINERY ROOMS

contain a beautiful assortment of Millinery, Head Dresses, Flowers, Crape and Muslin Collars, Berthes, &c. with every description of Jewellery for Mourning.

**W. C. Jay & Co., 247, 249, and 251, Regent-street.**





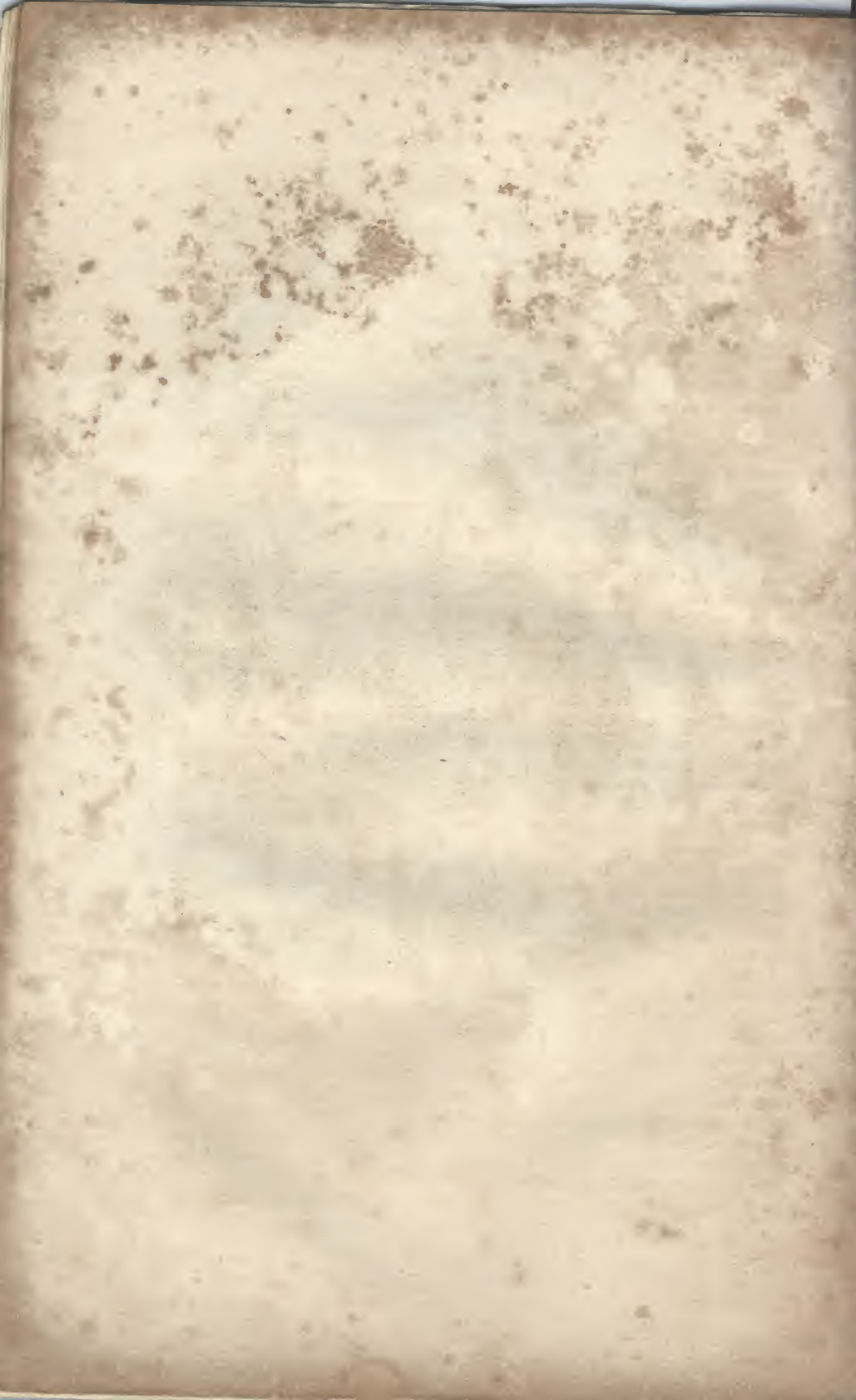


*Solemn reference is made to Mr. Bunby.*





*Mr. Carter introduces himself to Florence & the Skittles family.*





# CHAPTER XXIII.

## FLORENCE SOLITARY, AND THE MIDSHIPMAN MYSTERIOUS.

FLORENCE lived alone in the great dreary house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone; and the blank walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

No magic dwelling-place in magic story, shut up in the heart of a thick wood, was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy, than was her father's mansion in its grim reality, as it stood lowering on the street: always by night, when lights were shining from neighbouring windows, a blot upon its scanty brightness; always by day, a frown upon its never-smiling face.

There were not two dragon sentries keeping ward before the gate of this abode, as in magic legend are usually found on duty over the wronged innocence imprisoned; but besides a glowering visage, with its thin lips parted wickedly, that surveyed all comers from above the archway of the door, there was a monstrous fantasy of rusty iron curling and twisting like a petrification of an arbour over the threshold, budding in spikes and corkscrew points, and bearing, one on either side, two ominous extinguishers, that seemed to say, "Who enter here, leave light behind!" There were no talismanic characters engraven on the portal, but the house was now so neglected in appearance, that boys chalked the railings and the pavement—particularly round the corner where the side wall was—and drew ghosts on the stable door; and being sometimes driven off by Mr. Towlinson, made portraits of him, in return, with his ears growing out horizontally from under his hat. Noise ceased to be, within the shadow of the roof. The brass band that came into the street once a week, in the morning, never brayed a note in at those windows; but all such company, down to a poor little piping organ of weak intellect, with an imbecile party of automaton dancers, waltzing in and out at folding doors, fell off from it with one accord, and shunned it as a hopeless place.

The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired. The passive desolation of disuse was everywhere silently manifest about it. Within doors, curtains, drooping heavily, lost their old folds and shapes, and hung like cumbrous palls. Hecatombs of furniture, still piled and covered up, shrunk like imprisoned and forgotten men, and changed insensibly. Mirrors were dim as with the breath of years. Patterns of carpets faded and became perplexed and faint, like the memory of those years' trifling incidents. Boards, starting at unwonted foot-steps, creaked and shook. Keys rusted in the locks of doors. Damp started on the walls, and as the stains came out, the pictures seemed to go in and secrete themselves. Mildew and mould began to lurk in closets.

Fungus trees grew in corners of the cellars. Dust accumulated, nobody knew whence nor how ; spiders, moths, and grubs were heard of every day. An exploratory black-beetle now and then was found immovable upon the stairs, or in an upper room, as wondering how he got there. Rats began to squeak and scuffle in the night time, through dark galleries they mined behind the panelling.

The dreary magnificence of the state rooms, seen imperfectly by the doubtful light admitted through closed shutters, would have answered well enough for an enchanted abode. Such as the tarnished paws of gilded lions, stealthily put out from beneath their wrappers ; the marble lineaments of busts on pedestals, fearfully revealing themselves through veils ; the clocks that never told the time, or, if wound up by any chance, told it wrong, and struck unearthly numbers, which are not upon the dial ; the accidental tinklings among the pendant lustres, more startling than alarm-bells ; the softened sounds and laggard air that made their way among these objects, and a phantom crowd of others, shrouded and hooded, and made spectral of shape. But, besides, there was the great staircase, where the lord of the place so rarely set his foot, and by which his little child had gone up to Heaven. There were other staircases and passages where no one went for weeks together ; there were two closed rooms associated with dead members of the family, and with whispered recollections of them ; and to all the house but Florence, there was a gentle figure moving through the solitude and gloom, that gave to every lifeless thing a touch of present human interest and wonder.

For Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the cold walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

The grass began to grow upon the roof, and in the crevices of the basement paving. A scaly crumbling vegetation sprouted round the window-sills. Fragments of mortar lost their hold upon the insides of the unused chimneys, and came dropping down. The two trees with the smoky trunks were blighted high up, and the withered branches domineered above the leaves. Through the whole building, white had turned yellow, yellow nearly black ; and since the time when the poor lady died, it had slowly become a dark gap in the long monotonous street.

But Florence bloomed there, like the king's fair daughter in the story. Her books, her music, and her daily teachers, were her only real companions, Susan Nipper and Diogenes excepted : of whom the former, in her attendance on the studies of her young mistress, began to grow quite learned herself, while the latter, softened possibly by the same influences, would lay his head upon the window-ledge, and placidly open and shut his eyes upon the street, all through a summer morning ; sometimes pricking up his head to look with great significance after some noisy dog in a cart, who was barking his way along, and sometimes, with an exasperated and unaccountable recollection of his supposed enemy in the neighbourhood, rushing to the door, whence, after a deafening disturbance, he would come jogging back with a ridiculous complacency that belonged to him, and lay his jaw upon the window-ledge again, with the air of a dog who had done a public service.



So Florence lived in her wilderness of a home, within the circle of her innocent pursuits and thoughts, and nothing harmed her. She could go down to her father's rooms now, and think of him, and suffer her loving heart humbly to approach him, without fear of repulse. She could look upon the objects that had surrounded him in his sorrow, and could nestle near his chair, and not dread the glance that she so well remembered. She could render him such little tokens of her duty and service, as putting everything in order for him with her own hands, binding little nosegays for his table, changing them as one by one they withered and he did not come back, preparing something for him every day, and leaving some timid mark of her presence near his usual seat. To-day, it was a little painted stand for his watch; to-morrow, she would be afraid to leave it, and would substitute some other trifle of her making not so likely to attract his eye. Waking in the night, perhaps, she would tremble at the thought of his coming home and angrily rejecting it, and would hurry down with slippered feet and quickly beating heart, and bring it away. At another time, she would only lay her face upon his desk, and leave a kiss there, and a tear.

Still no one knew of this. Unless the household found it out when she was not there—and they all held Mr. Dombey's rooms in awe—it was as deep a secret in her breast as what had gone before it. Florence stole into those rooms at twilight, early in the morning, and at times when meals were served down stairs. And although they were in every nook the better and the brighter for her care, she entered and passed out as quietly as any sunbeam, excepting that she left her light behind.

Shadowy company attended Florence up and down the echoing house, and sat with her in the dismantled rooms. As if her life were an enchanted vision, there arose out of her solitude ministering thoughts, that made it fanciful and unreal. She imagined so often what her life would have been if her father could have loved her and she had been a favourite child, that sometimes, for the moment, she almost believed it was so, and, borne on by the current of that pensive fiction, seemed to remember how they had watched her brother in his grave together; how they had freely shared his heart between them; how they were united in the dear remembrance of him; how they often spoke about him yet; and her kind father, looking at her gently, told her of their common hope and trust in God. At other times she pictured to herself her mother yet alive. And oh the happiness of falling on her neck, and clinging to her with the love and confidence of all her soul! And oh the desolation of the solitary house again, with evening coming on, and no one there!

But there was one thought, scarcely shaped out to herself, yet fervent and strong within her, that upheld Florence when she strove and filled her true young heart, so sorely tried, with constancy of purpose. Into her mind, as into all others contending with the great affliction of our mortal nature, there had stolen solemn wonderings and hopes, arising in the dim world beyond the present life, and murmuring, like faint music, of recognition in the far off land between her brother and her mother: of some present consciousness in both of her: some love and commiseration for her: and some knowledge of her as she went her way upon the earth. It was a soothing consolation

to Florence to give shelter to these thoughts, until one day—it was soon after she had last seen her father in his own room, late at night—the fancy came upon her, that, in weeping for his alienated heart, she might stir the spirits of the dead against him. Wild, weak, childish, as it may have been to think so, and to tremble at the half-formed thought, it was the impulse of her loving nature; and from that hour Florence strove against the cruel wound in her breast, and tried to think of him whose hand had made it, only with hope.

Her father did not know—she held to it from that time—how much she loved him. She was very young, and had no mother, and had never learned, by some fault or misfortune, how to express to him that she loved him. She would be patient, and would try to gain that art in time, and win him to a better knowledge of his only child.

This became the purpose of her life. The morning sun shone down upon the faded house, and found the resolution bright and fresh within the bosom of its solitary mistress. Through all the duties of the day, it animated her; for Florence hoped that the more she knew, and the more accomplished she became, the more glad he would be when he came to know and like her. Sometimes she wondered, with a swelling heart and rising tear, whether she was proficient enough in anything to surprise him when they should become companions. Sometimes she tried to think if there were any kind of knowledge that would bespeak his interest more readily than another. Always: at her books, her music, and her work: in her morning walks, and in her nightly prayers: she had her engrossing aim in view. Strange study for a child, to learn the road to a hard parent's heart!

There were many careless loungers through the street, as the summer evening deepened into night, who glanced across the road at the sombre house, and saw the youthful figure at the window, such a contrast to it, looking upward at the stars as they began to shine, who would have slept the worse if they had known on what design she mused so steadfastly. The reputation of the mansion as a haunted house, would not have been the gayer with some humble dwellers elsewhere, who were struck by its external gloom in passing and repassing on their daily avocations, and so named it, if they could have read its story in the darkening face. But Florence held her sacred purpose, unsuspected and unaided: and studied only how to bring her father to the understanding that she loved him, and made no appeal against him in any wandering thought.

Thus Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the monotonous walls looked down upon her with a stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like intent to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

Susan Nipper stood opposite to her young mistress one morning, as she folded and sealed a note she had been writing: and showed in her looks an approving knowledge of its contents.

"Better late than never, dear Miss Floy," said Susan, "and I do say, that even a visit to them old Skettleses will be a God-send."

"It is very good of Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles, Susan," returned Florence, with a mild correction of that young lady's familiar mention of the family in question, "to repeat their invitation so kindly."



Miss Nipper, who was perhaps the most thorough-going partisan on the face of the earth, and who carried her partisanship into all matters great or small, and perpetually waged war with it against society, screwed up her lips and shook her head, as a protest against any recognition of disinterestedness in the Skettleses, and a plea in bar that they would have valuable consideration for their kindness, in the company of Florence.

"They know what they're about, if ever people did," murmured Miss Nipper, drawing in her breath, "oh! trust them Skettleses for that!"

"I am not very anxious to go to Fulham, Susan, I confess," said Florence thoughtfully; "but it will be right to go. I think it will be better."

"Much better," interposed Susan, with another emphatic shake of her head.

"And so," said Florence, "though I would prefer to have gone when there was no one there, instead of in this vacation time, when it seems there are some young people staying in the house, I have thankfully said yes."

"For which I say, Miss Floy, Oh be joyful!" returned Susan. "Ah! h—h!"

This last ejaculation, with which Miss Nipper frequently wound up a sentence, at about that epoch of time, was supposed below the level of the hall to have a general reference to Mr. Dombey, and to be expressive of a yearning in Miss Nipper to favour that gentleman with a piece of her mind. But she never explained it; and it had, in consequence, the charm of mystery, in addition to the advantage of the sharpest expression.

"How long it is before we have any news of Walter, Susan!" observed Florence after a moment's silence.

"Long indeed, Miss Floy!" replied her maid. "And Perch said, when he came just now to see for letters—but what signifies what *he* says!" exclaimed Susan, reddening and breaking off. "Much *he* knows about it!"

Florence raised her eyes quickly, and a flush overspread her face.

"If I hadn't," said Susan Nipper, evidently struggling with some latent anxiety and alarm, and looking full at her young mistress, while endeavouring to work herself into a state of resentment with the unoffending Mr. Perch's image, "if I hadn't more manliness than that insipidest of his sex, I'd never take pride in my hair again, but turn it up behind my ears, and wear coarse caps, without a bit of border, until death released me from my insignificance, I may not be an Amazon, Miss Floy, and wouldn't so demean myself by such disfigurement, but anyways I'm not a giver-up, I hope."

"Give up! What?" cried Florence, with a face of terror:

"Why, nothing, Miss," said Susan. "Good gracious, nothing! It's only that wet curl-paper of a man, Perch, that any one might almost make away with, with a touch, and really it would be a blessed event for all parties if some one *would* take pity on him, and would have the goodness!"

"Does he give up the ship, Susan?" inquired Florence, very pale.

"No, Miss," returned Susan, "I should like to see him make so bold

as do it to my face! No, Miss, but he goes on about some bothering ginger that Mr. Walter was to send to Mrs. Perch, and shakes his dismal head, and says he hopes it may be coming; any how, he says, it can't come now in time for the intended occasion, but may do for next, which really," said Miss Nipper, with aggravated scorn, "puts me out of patience with the man, for though I can bear a great deal, I am not a camel, neither am I," added Susan, after a moment's consideration, "if I know myself, a dromedary neither."

"What else does he say, Susan?" inquired Florence, earnestly. "Won't you tell me?"

"As if I wouldn't tell you anything, Miss Floy, and everything!" said Susan. "Why Miss, he says that there begins to be a general talk about the ship, and that they have never had a ship on that voyage half so long unheard of, and that the captain's wife was at the office yesterday, and seemed a little put out about it, but any one could say that, we knew nearly that before."

"I must visit Walter's uncle," said Florence, hurriedly, "before I leave home. I will go and see him this morning. Let us walk there, directly, Susan."

Miss Nipper having nothing to urge against the proposal, but being perfectly acquiescent, they were soon equipped, and in the streets, and on their way towards the little Midshipman.

The state of mind in which poor Walter had gone to Captain Cuttle's, on the day when Brogley the broker came into possession, and when there seemed to him to be an execution in the very steeples, was pretty much the same as that in which Florence now took her way to Uncle Sol's; with this difference, that Florence suffered the added pain of thinking that she had been, perhaps, the innocent occasion of involving Walter in peril, and all to whom he was dear, herself included, in an agony of suspense. For the rest, uncertainty and danger seemed written upon everything. The weathercocks on spires and housetops were mysterious with hints of stormy wind, and pointed, like so many ghostly fingers, out to dangerous seas, where fragments of great wrecks were drifting, perhaps, and helpless men were rocked upon them into a sleep as deep as the unfathomable waters. When Florence came into the city, and passed gentlemen who were talking together, she dreaded to hear them speaking of the ship, and saying it was lost. Pictures and prints of vessels fighting with the rolling waves filled her with alarm. The smoke and clouds, though moving gently, moved too fast for her apprehensions, and made her fear there was a tempest blowing at that moment on the ocean.

Susan Nipper may or may not have been affected similarly, but having her attention much engaged in struggles with boys, whenever there was any press of people—for, between that grade of human kind and herself, there was some natural animosity that invariably broke out, whenever they came together—it would seem that she had not much leisure on the road for intellectual operations.

Arriving in good time abreast of the wooden Midshipman on the opposite side of the way, and waiting for an opportunity to cross the street, they were a little surprised at first to see, at the Instrument-maker's door, a round-headed lad, with his chubby face addressed towards the sky, who,



as they looked at him, suddenly thrust into his capacious mouth two fingers of each hand, and with the assistance of that machinery whistled, with astonishing shrillness, to some pigeons at a considerable elevation in the air.

"Mrs. Richards's eldest, Miss!" said Susan, "and the worrit of Mrs. Richards's life!"

As Polly had been to tell Florence of the resuscitated prospects of her son and heir, Florence was prepared for the meeting: so, a favourable moment presenting itself, they both hastened across, without any further contemplation of Mrs. Richards's bane. That sporting character, unconscious of their approach, again whistled with his utmost might, and then yelled in a rapture of excitement, "Strays! Whoo-oo! Strays!" which identification had such an effect upon the conscience-stricken pigeons, that instead of going direct to some town in the North of England, as appeared to have been their original intention, they began to wheel and falter; whereupon Mrs. Richards's first-born pierced them with another whistle, and again yelled, in a voice that rose above the turmoil of the street, "Strays! Whoo-oo! Strays!"

From this transport, he was abruptly recalled to terrestrial objects, by a poke from Miss Nipper, which sent him into the shop.

"Is this the way you show your penitence, when Mrs. Richards has been fretting for you months and months!" said Susan, following the poke. "Where's Mr. Gills?"

Rob, who smoothed his first rebellious glance at Miss Nipper when he saw Florence following, put his knuckles to his hair, in honour of the latter, and said to the former, that Mr. Gills was out.

"Fetch him home," said Miss Nipper, with authority, "and say that my young lady's here."

"I don't know where he's gone," said Rob.

"Is *that* your penitence?" cried Susan, with stinging sharpness.

"Why, how can I go and fetch him when I don't know where to go?" whimpered the baited Rob. "How can you be so unreasonable?"

"Did Mr. Gills say when he should be home?" asked Florence.

"Yes, Miss," replied Rob, with another application of his knuckles to his hair. "He said he should be home early in the afternoon; in about a couple of hours from now, Miss."

"Is he very anxious about his nephew?" inquired Susan.

"Yes, Miss," returned Rob, preferring to address himself to Florence and slighting Nipper; "I should say he was, very much so. He ain't indoors, Miss, not a quarter of an hour together. He can't settle in one place five minutes. He goes about, like a—just like a stray," said Rob, stooping to get a glimpse of the pigeons through the window, and checking himself, with his fingers half-way to his mouth, on the verge of another whistle.

"Do you know a friend of Mr. Gills, called Captain Cuttle?" inquired Florence, after a moment's reflection.

"Him with a hook, Miss?" rejoined Rob with an illustrative twist of his left hand. "Yes, Miss. He was here the day before yesterday."

"Has he not been here since?" asked Susan.

"No, Miss," returned Rob, still addressing his reply to Florence.

"Perhaps Walter's uncle has gone there, Susan," observed Florence, turning to her.

"To Captain Cuttle's, Miss?" interposed Rob, "no, he's not gone there, Miss. Because he left particular word that if Captain Cuttle called, I should tell him how surprised he was, not to have seen him yesterday, and should make him stop 'till he came back."

"Do you know where Captain Cuttle lives?" asked Florence.

Rob replied in the affirmative, and turning to a greasy parchment book on the shop desk, read the address aloud.

Florence again turned to her maid and took counsel with her in a low voice, while Rob the round-eyed, mindful of his patron's secret charge, looked on and listened. Florence proposed that they should go to Captain Cuttle's house; hear from his own lips, what he thought of the absence of any tidings of the Son and Heir; and bring him, if they could, to comfort Uncle Sol. Susan at first objected slightly, on the score of distance; but a hackney-coach being mentioned by her mistress, withdrew that opposition, and gave in her assent. There were some minutes of discussion between them before they came to this conclusion, during which the staring Rob paid close attention to both speakers, and inclined his ear to each by turns, as if he were appointed arbitrator of the arguments.

In fine, Rob was despatched for a coach, the visitors keeping shop meanwhile; and when he brought it, they got into it, leaving word for Uncle Sol that they would be sure to call again, on their way back. Rob having stared after the coach until it was as invisible as the pigeons had now become, sat down behind the desk with a most assiduous demeanour; and in order that he might forget nothing of what had transpired, made notes of it on various small scraps of paper, with a vast expenditure of ink. There was no danger of these documents betraying anything, if accidentally lost; for long before a word was dry, it became as profound a mystery to Rob, as if he had had no part whatever in its production.

While he was yet busy with these labours, the hackney-coach, after encountering unheard-of difficulties from swivel-bridges, soft roads, impassable canals, caravans of casks, settlements of scarlet-beans and little wash-houses, and many such obstacles abounding in that country, stopped at the corner of Brig Place. Alighting here, Florence and Susan Nipper walked down the street, and sought out the abode of Captain Cuttle.

It happened by evil chance to be one of Mrs. Mac Stinger's great cleaning days. On these occasions, Mrs. Mac Stinger was knocked up by the policeman at a quarter before three in the morning, and rarely succumbed before twelve o'clock next night. The chief object of this institution appeared to be, that Mrs. Mac Stinger should move all the furniture into the back garden at early dawn, walk about the house in pattens all day, and move the furniture back again after dark. These ceremonies greatly fluttered those doves the young Mac Stingers, who were not only unable at such times to find any resting-place for the soles of their feet, but generally came in for a good deal of pecking from the maternal bird during the progress of the solemnities.

At the moment when Florence and Susan Nipper presented themselves at Mrs. Mac Stinger's door, that worthy but redoubtable female was in



the act of conveying Alexander Mac Stinger, aged two years and three months, along the passage, for forcible deposition in a sitting posture on the street pavement: Alexander being black in the face with holding his breath after punishment, and a cool paving-stone being usually found to act as a powerful restorative in such cases.

The feelings of Mrs. Mac Stinger, as a woman and a mother, were outraged by the look of pity for Alexander which she observed on Florence's face. Therefore, Mrs. Mac Stinger asserting those finest emotions of our nature, in preference to weakly gratifying her curiosity, shook and buffeted Alexander, both before and during the application of the paving-stone, and took no further notice of the strangers.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Florence, when the child had found his breath again, and was using it. "Is this Captain Cuttle's house?"

"No," said Mrs. Mac Stinger.

"Not Number Nine?" asked Florence, hesitating.

"Who said it wasn't Number Nine?" said Mrs. Mac Stinger.

"Susan Nipper instantly struck in, and begged to inquire what Mrs. Mac Stinger meant by that, and if she knew whom she was talking to.

Mrs. Mac Stinger in retort, looked at her all over. "What do *you* want with Captain Cuttle, I should wish to know!" said Mrs. Mac Stinger.

"Should you? Then I'm sorry that you won't be satisfied," returned Miss Nipper.

"Hush, Susan! If you please!" said Florence. "Perhaps you can have the goodness to tell us where Captain Cuttle lives, ma'am, as he don't live here."

"Who says he don't live here?" retorted the implacable Mac Stinger. "I said it wasn't Cap'en Cuttle's house—and it a'n't his house—and forbid it, that it ever should be his house—for Cap'en Cuttle don't know how to keep a house—and don't deserve to have a house—it's *my* house—and when I let the upper floor to Cap'en Cuttle, oh I do a thankless thing, and cast pearls before swine!"

Mrs. Mac Stinger pitched her voice for the upper windows in offering these remarks, and cracked off each clause sharply by itself as if from a rifle possessing an infinity of barrels. After the last shot, the Captain's voice was heard to say, in feeble remonstrance from his own room, "Steady below!"

"Since you want Cap'en Cuttle, there he is!" said Mrs. Mac Stinger, with an angry motion of her hand. On Florence making bold to enter, without any more parley, and on Susan following, Mrs. Mac Stinger recommenced her pedestrian exercise in pattens, and Alexander Mac Stinger (still on the paving-stone), who had stopped in his crying to attend to the conversation, began to wail again, entertaining himself during that dismal performance, which was quite mechanical, with a general survey of the prospect, terminating in the hackney-coach.

The Captain in his own apartment was sitting with his hands in his pockets and his legs drawn up under his chair, on a very small desolate island, lying about midway in an ocean of soap and water. The Captain's windows had been cleaned, the walls had been cleaned, the

stove had been cleaned, and everything, the stove excepted, was wet, and shining with soft soap and sand: the smell of which dry-saltery impregnated the air. In the midst of the dreary scene, the Captain, cast away upon his island, looked round on the waste of waters with a rueful countenance, and seemed waiting for some friendly bark to come that way, and take him off.

But when the Captain, directing his forlorn visage towards the door, saw Florence appear with her maid, no words can describe his astonishment. Mrs. MacStinger's eloquence having rendered all other sounds but imperfectly distinguishable, he had looked for no rarer visitor than the potboy or the milkman; wherefore, when Florence appeared, and coming to the confines of the island, put her hand in his, the Captain stood up, aghast, as if he supposed her, for the moment, to be some young member of the Flying Dutchman's family.

Instantly recovering his self-possession, however, the Captain's first care was to place her on dry land, which he happily accomplished, with one motion of his arm. Issuing forth, then, upon the main, Captain Cuttle took Miss Nipper round the waist, and bore her to the island also. Captain Cuttle, then, with great respect and admiration, raised the hand of Florence to his lips, and standing off a little (for the island was not large enough for three), beamed on her from the soap and water like a new description of Triton.

"You are amazed to see us, I am sure," said Florence, with a smile.

The inexpressibly gratified Captain kissed his hook in reply, and growled, as if a choice and delicate compliment were included in the words, "Stand by! Stand by!"

"But I couldn't rest," said Florence, "without coming to ask you what you think about dear Walter—who is my brother now—and whether there is anything to fear, and whether you will not go and console his poor uncle every day, until we have some intelligence of him?"

At these words Captain Cuttle, as by an involuntary gesture, clapped his hand to his head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited.

"Have you any fears for Walter's safety?" inquired Florence, from whose face the Captain (so enraptured he was with it) could not take his eyes: while she, in her turn, looked earnestly at him, to be assured of the sincerity of his reply.

"No, Heart's-delight," said Captain Cuttle, "I am not afeard. Wal'r is a lad as 'll go through a deal o' hard weather. Wal'r is a lad as 'll bring as much success to that 'ere brig as a lad is capable on. Wal'r," said the Captain, his eyes glistening with the praise of his young friend, and his hook raised to announce a beautiful quotation, "is what you may call a out'ard and visible sign of a in'ard and spirited grasp, and when found make a note of."

Florence, who did not quite understand this, though the Captain evidently thought it full of meaning, and highly satisfactory, mildly looked to him for something more.

"I am not afeard, my Heart's-delight," resumed the Captain. "There's been most uncommon bad weather in them latitudes, there's no denyin, and they have drove and drove and been beat off, may be t' other side the



world. But the ship's a good ship, and the lad's a good lad; and it ain't easy, thank the Lord," the Captain made a little bow, "to break up hearts of oak, whether they're in brigs or buzzums. Here we have 'em both ways, which is bringing it up with a round turn, and so I ain't a bit afeard as yet."

"As yet?" repeated Florence.

"Not a bit," returned the Captain, kissing his iron hand; "and afore I begin to be, my Heart's-delight, Wal'r will have wrote home from the island, or from some port or another, and made all taut and ship-shape. And with regard to old Sol Gills," here the Captain became solemn, "who I'll stand by, and not desert until death doe us part, and when the stormy winds do blow, do blow, do blow—overhaul the Catechism," said the Captain, parenthetically, "and there you'll find them expressions—if it would console Sol Gills to have the opinion of a seafaring man as has got a mind equal to any undertaking that he puts it alongside of, and as was all but smashed in his 'prenticeship, and of which the name is Bunsby, that 'ere man shall give him such an opinion in his own parlour as'll stun him. Ah!" said Captain Cuttle, vauntingly, "as much as if he'd gone and knocked his head again a door!"

"Let us take this gentleman to see him, and let us hear what he says," cried Florence. "Will you go with us now? We have a coach here."

Again the Captain clapped his hand to his head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited. But at this instant a most remarkable phenomenon occurred. The door opening, without any note of preparation, and apparently of itself, the hard glazed hat in question skimmed into the room like a bird, and alighted heavily at the Captain's feet. The door then shut as violently as it had opened, and nothing ensued in explanation of the prodigy.

Captain Cuttle picked up his hat, and having turned it over with a look of interest and welcome, began to polish it on his sleeve. While doing so, the Captain eyed his visitors intently, and said in a low voice:

"You see I should have bore down on Sol Gills yesterday, and this morning; but she—she took it away and kep it. That's the long and short of the subject."

"Who did, for goodness' sake?" asked Susan Nipper.

"The lady of the house, my dear," returned the Captain, in a gruff whisper, and making signals of secrecy. "We had some words about the swabbing of these here planks, and she—in short," said the Captain, eyeing the door, and relieving himself with a long breath, "she stopped my liberty."

"Oh! I wish she had me to deal with!" said Susan, reddening with the energy of the wish. "I'd stop her!"

"Would you, do you think, my dear?" rejoined the Captain, shaking his head doubtfully, but regarding the desperate courage of the fair aspirant with obvious admiration. "I don't know. It's difficult navigation. She's very hard to carry on with, my dear. You never can tell how she'll head, you see. She's full one minute, and round upon you next. And when she is a tartar," said the Captain, with the perspiration breaking out upon his forehead—. There was nothing but a whistle emphatic enough for the conclusion of the sentence, so the Captain

whistled tremulously. After which he again shook his head, and recurring to his admiration of Miss Nipper's devoted bravery, timidly repeated, "Would you, do you think, my dear?"

Susan only replied with a bridling smile, but that was so very full of defiance, that there is no knowing how long Captain Cuttle might have stood entranced in its contemplation, if Florence in her anxiety had not again proposed their immediately resorting to the oracular Bunsby. Thus reminded of his duty, Captain Cuttle put on the glazed hat firmly, took up another knobby stick, with which he had supplied the place of that one given to Walter, and offering his arm to Florence, prepared to cut his way through the enemy.

It turned out, however, that Mrs. Mac Stinger had already changed her course, and that she headed, as the Captain had remarked she often did, in quite a new direction. For when they got down stairs, they found that exemplary woman beating the mats on the door-steps, with Alexander, still upon the paving-stone, dimly looming through a fog of dust; and so absorbed was Mrs. Mac Stinger in her household occupation, that when Captain Cuttle and his visitors passed, she beat the harder, and neither by word nor gesture showed any consciousness of their vicinity. The Captain was so well pleased with this easy escape—although the effect of the door-mats on him was like a copious administration of snuff, and made him sneeze until the tears ran down his face—that he could hardly believe his good fortune; but more than once, between the door and the hackney-coach, looked over his shoulder, with an obvious apprehension of Mrs. Mac Stinger's giving chase yet.

However, they got to the corner of Brig Place without any molestation from that terrible fire-ship; and the Captain mounting the coach-box—for his gallantry would not allow him to ride inside with the ladies, though besought to do so—piloted the driver on his course for Captain Bunsby's vessel, which was called the Cautious Clara, and was lying hard by Ratcliffe.

Arrived at the wharf off which this great commander's ship was jammed in among some five hundred companions, whose tangled rigging looked like monstrous cobwebs half swept down, Captain Cuttle appeared at the coach window, and invited Florence and Miss Nipper to accompany him on board; observing that Bunsby was to the last degree soft-hearted in respect of ladies, and that nothing would so much tend to bring his expansive intellect into a state of harmony as their presentation to the Cautious Clara.

Florence readily consented; and the Captain, taking her little hand in his prodigious palm, led her, with a mixed expression of patronage, pater-nity, pride, and ceremony, that was pleasant to see, over several very dirty decks, until, coming to the Clara, they found that cautious craft (which lay outside the tier) with her gangway removed, and half-a-dozen feet of river interposed between herself and her nearest neighbour. It appeared, from Captain Cuttle's explanation, that the great Bunsby, like himself, was cruelly treated by his landlady, and that when her usage of him for the time being was so hard that he could bear it no longer, he set this gulf between them as a last resource.



"Clara a-hoy!" cried the Captain, putting a hand to each side of his mouth.

"A-hoy!" cried a boy, like the Captain's echo, tumbling up from below.

"Bunsby aboard?" cried the Captain, hailing the boy in a stentorian voice, as if he were half-a-mile off instead of two yards.

"Aye, aye!" cried the boy, in the same tone.

The boy then shoved out a plank to Captain Cuttle, who adjusted it carefully, and led Florence across: returning presently for Miss Nipper. So they stood upon the deck of the Cautious Clara, in whose standing rigging, divers fluttering articles of dress were curing, in company with a few tongues and some mackerel.

Immediately there appeared, coming slowly up above the bulk-head of the cabin, another bulk-head—human, and very large—with one stationary eye in the mahogany face, and one revolving one, on the principle of some light-houses. This head was decorated with shaggy hair, like oakum, which had no governing inclination towards the north, east, west, or south, but inclined to all four quarters of the compass, and to every point upon it. The head was followed by a perfect desert of chin, and by a shirt-collar and neckerchief, and by a dreadnought pilot coat, and by a pair of dreadnought pilot trousers, whereof the waistband was so very broad and high, that it became a succedaneum for a waistcoat: being ornamented near the wearer's breast-bone with some massive wooden buttons, like backgammon men. As the lower portions of these pantaloons became revealed, Bunsby stood confessed; his hands in their pockets, which were of vast size; and his gaze directed, not to Captain Cuttle or the ladies, but the mast-head.

The profound appearance of this philosopher, who was bulky and strong, and on whose extremely red face an expression of taciturnity sat enthroned, not inconsistent with his character, in which that quality was proudly conspicuous, almost daunted Captain Cuttle, though on familiar terms with him. Whispering to Florence that Bunsby had never in his life expressed surprise, and was considered not to know what it meant, the Captain watched him as he eyed his mast-head, and afterwards swept the horizon; and when the revolving eye seemed to be coming round in his direction, said:

"Bunsby, my lad, how fares it?"

A deep, gruff, husky utterance, which seemed to have no connection with Bunsby, and certainly had not the least effect upon his face, replied, "Aye, aye, shipmet, how goes it!" At the same time Bunsby's right hand and arm emerging from a pocket, shook the Captain's, and went back again.

"Bunsby," said the Captain, striking home at once, "here you are; a man of mind, and a man as can give an opinion. Here's a young lady as wants to take that opinion, in regard of my friend Wal'r; likewise my t'other friend, Sol Gills, which is a character for you to come within hail of, being a man of science, which is the mother of invention, and knows no law. Bunsby, will you wear, to oblige me, and come along with us?"

The great commander, who seemed by the expression of his visage to

be always on the look-out for something in the extremest distance, and to have no ocular knowledge of anything within ten miles, made no reply whatever.

"Here is a man," said the Captain, addressing himself to his fair auditors, and indicating the commander with his outstretched hook, "that has fell down, more than any man alive; that has had more accidents happen to his own self than the Seamen's Hospital to all hands; that took as many spars and bars and bolts about the outside of his head when he was young, as you'd want a order for on Chatham-yard to build a pleasure-yacht with; and yet that got his opinions in that way, it's my belief, for there an't nothing like 'em afloat or ashore."

The stolid commander appeared, by a very slight vibration in his elbows, to express some satisfaction in this encomium; but if his face had been as distant as his gaze was, it could hardly have enlightened the beholders less in reference to anything that was passing in his thoughts.

"Shipmet," said Bunsby, all of a sudden, and stooping down to look out under some interposing spar, "what 'll the ladies drink?"

Captain Cuttle, whose delicacy was shocked by such an inquiry in connection with Florence, drew the sage aside, and seeming to explain in his ear, accompanied him below; where, that he might not take offence, the Captain drank a dram himself, which Florence and Susan, glancing down the open skylight, saw the sage, with difficulty finding room for himself between his berth and a very little brass fireplace, serve out for self and friend. They soon reappeared on deck, and Captain Cuttle, triumphing in the success of his enterprise, conducted Florence back to the coach, while Bunsby followed, escorting Miss Nipper, whom he hugged upon the way (much to that young lady's indignation) with his pilot-coated arm, like a blue bear.

The Captain put his oracle inside, and gloried so much in having secured him, and having got that mind into a hackney-coach, that he could not refrain from often peeping in at Florence through the little window behind the driver, and testifying his delight in smiles, and also in taps upon his forehead, to hint to her that the brain of Bunsby was hard at it. In the mean time, Bunsby, still hugging Miss Nipper (for his friend, the Captain, had not exaggerated the softness of his heart), uniformly preserved his gravity of deportment, and showed no other consciousness of her or anything.

Uncle Sol, who had come home, received them at the door, and ushered them immediately into the little back parlour: strangely altered by the absence of Walter. On the table, and about the room, were the charts and maps on which the heavy-hearted Instrument-maker had again and again tracked the missing vessel across the sea, and on which, with a pair of compasses that he still had in his hand, he had been measuring, a minute before, how far she must have driven, to have driven here or there: and trying to demonstrate that a long time must elapse before hope was exhausted.

"Whether she can have run," said Uncle Sol, looking wistfully over the chart; "but no, that's almost impossible. Or whether she can have been forced by stress of weather,—but that's not reasonably likely. Or whether there is any hope she so far changed her course as—but even I



can hardly hope that!" With such broken suggestions, poor old Uncle Sol roamed over the great sheet before him, and could not find a speck of hopeful probability in it large enough to set one small point of the compasses upon.

Florence saw immediately—it would have been difficult to help seeing—that there was a singular, indescribable change in the old man, and that while his manner was far more restless and unsettled than usual, there was yet a curious, contradictory decision in it, that perplexed her very much. She fancied once that he spoke wildly, and at random; for on her saying she regretted not to have seen him when she had been there before that morning, he at first replied that he had been to see her, and directly afterwards seemed to wish to recall that answer.

"You have been to see me?" said Florence. "To-day?"

"Yes, my dear young lady," returned Uncle Sol, looking at her and away from her in a confused manner. "I wished to see you with my own eyes, and to hear you with my own ears, once more before—" There he stopped.

"Before when? Before what?" said Florence, putting her hand upon his arm.

"Did I say 'before?'" replied old Sol. "If I did, I must have meant before we should have news of my dear boy."

"You are not well," said Florence, tenderly. "You have been so very anxious. I am sure you are not well."

"I am as well," returned the old man, shutting up his right hand, and holding it out to show her: "as well and firm as any man at my time of life can hope to be. See! It's steady. Is its master not as capable of resolution and fortitude as many a younger man? I think so. We shall see."

There was that in his manner more than in his words, though they remained with her too, which impressed Florence so much, that she would have confided her uneasiness to Captain Cuttle at that moment, if the Captain had not seized that moment for expounding the state of circumstances on which the opinion of the sagacious Bunsby was requested, and entreating that profound authority to deliver the same.

Bunsby, whose eye continued to be addressed to somewhere about the half-way house between London and Gravesend, two or three times put out his rough right arm, as seeking to wind it for inspiration, round the fair form of Miss Nipper; but that young female having withdrawn herself, in displeasure, to the opposite side of the table, the soft heart of the Commander of the Cautious Clara met with no response to its impulses. After sundry failures in this wise, the Commander, addressing himself to nobody, thus spake; or rather the voice within him said of its own accord, and quite independent of himself, as if he were possessed by a gruff spirit:

"My name's Jack Bunsby!"

"He was christened John," cried the delighted Captain Cuttle. "Hear him!"

"And what I says," pursued the voice, after some deliberation, "I stands to."

The Captain, with Florence on his arm, nodded at the auditory, and

seemed to say, "Now he's coming out. This is what I meant, when I brought him."

"Whereby," proceeded the voice, "why not? If so, what odds? Can any man say otherwise? No. Awast then!"

When it had pursued its train of argument to this point, the voice stopped, and rested. It then proceeded very slowly, thus:

"Do I believe that this here Son and Heir's gone down, my lads? Mayhap. Do I say so? Which? If a skipper stands out by Sen' George's Channel, making for the Downs, what's right ahead of him? The Goodwins. He is 'nt forced to run upon the Goodwins, but he may. The bearings of this observation lays in the application on it. That a'nt no part of my duty. Awast then, keep a bright look-out for'ard, and good luck to you!"

The voice here went out of the back parlour and into the street, taking the Commander of the Cautious Clara with it, and accompanying him on board again with all convenient expedition, where he immediately turned in, and refreshed his mind with a nap.

The students of the sage's precepts, left to their own application of his wisdom—upon a principle which was the main leg of the Bunsby tripod, as it is perchance of some other oracular stools—looked upon one another in a little uncertainty; while Rob the Grinder, who had taken the innocent freedom of peering in, and listening, through the skylight in the roof, came softly down from the leads, in a state of very dense confusion. Captain Cuttle, however, whose admiration of Bunsby was, if possible, enhanced by the splendid manner in which he had justified his reputation and come through this solemn reference, proceeded to explain that Bunsby meant nothing but confidence; that Bunsby had no misgivings; and that such an opinion as that man had given, coming from such a mind as his, was Hope's own anchor, with good roads to cast it in. Florence endeavoured to believe that the Captain was right; but the Nipper, with her arms tight folded, shook her head in resolute denial, and had no more trust in Bunsby than in Mr. Perch himself.

The philosopher seemed to have left Uncle Sol pretty much where he had found him, for he still went roaming about the watery world, compasses in hand, and discovering no rest for them. It was in pursuance of a whisper in his ear from Florence, while the old man was absorbed in this pursuit, that Captain Cuttle laid his heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"What cheer, Sol Gills?" cried the Captain, heartily.

"But so-so, Ned," returned the Instrument-maker. "I have been remembering, all this afternoon, that on the very day when my boy entered Dombey's house, and came home late to dinner, sitting just there where you stand, we talked of storm and shipwreck, and I could hardly turn him from the subject."

But meeting the eyes of Florence, which were fixed with earnest scrutiny upon his face, the old man stopped and smiled.

"Stand by, old friend!" cried the Captain. "Look alive! I tell you what, Sol Gills; arter I've convoyed Heart's-delight safe home," here the Captain kissed his hook to Florence, "I'll come back and take you in tow for the rest of this blessed day. You'll come and eat your dinner along with me, Sol, somewhere or other."



"Not to-day, Ned!" said the old man quickly, and appearing to be unaccountably startled by the proposition. "Not to-day. I couldn't do it!"

"Why not?" returned the Captain, gazing at him in astonishment.

"I—I have so much to do. I—I mean to think of, and arrange. I couldn't do it, Ned, indeed. I must go out again, and be alone, and turn my mind to many things to-day."

The Captain looked at the Instrument-maker, and looked at Florence, and again at the Instrument-maker. "To-morrow, then," he suggested, at last.

"Yes, yes. To-morrow," said the old man. "Think of me to-morrow. Say to-morrow."

"I shall come here early, mind, Sol Gills," stipulated the Captain.

"Yes, yes. The first thing to-morrow morning," said old Sol; "and now good bye Ned Cuttle, and God bless you!"

Squeezing both the Captain's hands, with uncommon fervour, as he said it, the old man turned to Florence, folded hers in his own, and put them to his lips; then hurried her out to the coach with very singular precipitation. Altogether, he made such an effect on Captain Cuttle that the Captain lingered behind, and instructed Rob to be particularly gentle and attentive to his master until the morning: which injunction he strengthened with the payment of one shilling down, and the promise of another sixpence before noon next day. This kind office performed, Captain Cuttle, who considered himself the natural and lawful body-guard of Florence, mounted the box with a mighty sense of his trust, and escorted her home. At parting, he assured her that he would stand by Sol Gills, close and true; and once again inquired of Susan Nipper, unable to forget her gallant words in reference to Mrs. Mac Stinger, "Would you, do you think, my dear, though!"

When the desolate house had closed upon the two, the Captain's thoughts reverted to the old Instrument-maker, and he felt uncomfortable. Therefore, instead of going home, he walked up and down the street several times, and, eking out his leisure until evening, dined late at a certain angular little tavern in the city, with a public parlour like a wedge, to which glazed hats much resorted. The Captain's principal intention was to pass Sol Gills's after dark, and look in through the window; which he did. The parlour door stood open, and he could see his old friend writing busily and steadily at the table within, while the little Midshipman, already sheltered from the night dews, watched him from the counter; under which Rob the Grinder made his own bed, preparatory to shutting the shop. Re-assured by the tranquillity that reigned within the precincts of the wooden mariner, the Captain headed for Brig Place, resolving to weigh anchor betimes in the morning.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE STUDY OF A LOVING HEART.

SIR BARNET and Lady Skettles, very good people, resided in a pretty villa at Fulham, on the banks of the Thames; which was one of the most desirable residences in the world when a rowing-match happened to be

going past, but had its little inconveniences at other times, among which may be enumerated the occasional appearance of the river in the drawing-room, and the cotemporaneous disappearance of the lawn and shrubbery.

Sir Barnet Skettles expressed his personal consequence chiefly through an antique gold snuff-box, and a ponderous silk pocket-handkerchief, which he had an imposing manner of drawing out of his pocket like a banner, and using with both hands at once. Sir Barnet's object in life was constantly to extend the range of his acquaintance. Like a heavy body dropped into water—not to disparage so worthy a gentleman by the comparison—it was in the nature of things that Sir Barnet must spread an ever-widening circle about him, until there was no room left. Or, like a sound in air, the vibration of which, according to the speculation of an ingenious modern philosopher, may go on travelling for ever through the interminable fields of space, nothing but coming to the end of his moral tether could stop Sir Barnet Skettles in his voyage of discovery through the social system.

Sir Barnet was proud of making people acquainted with people. He liked the thing for its own sake, and it advanced his favourite object too. For example, if Sir Barnet had the good fortune to get hold of a raw recruit, or a country gentleman, and ensnared him to his hospitable villa, Sir Barnet would say to him, on the morning after his arrival, "Now, my dear sir, is there anybody you would like to know? Who is there you would wish to meet? Do you take any interest in writing people, or in painting or sculpturing people, or in acting people, or in anything of that sort?" Possibly the patient answered yes, and mentioned somebody, of whom Sir Barnet had no more personal knowledge than of Ptolemy the Great. Sir Barnet replied, that nothing on earth was easier, as he knew him very well: immediately called on the aforesaid somebody, left his card, wrote a short note,—“My dear Sir—penalty of your eminent position—friend at my house naturally desirous—Lady Skettles and myself participate—trust that genius being superior to ceremonies, you will do us the distinguished favour of giving us the pleasure,” &c. &c.—and so killed a brace of birds with one stone, dead as door-nails.

With the snuff-box and banner in full force, Sir Barnet Skettles pounded his usual inquiry to Florence on the first morning of her visit. When Florence thanked him, and said there was no one in particular whom she desired to see, it was natural she should think, with a pang, of poor lost Walter. When Sir Barnet Skettles, urging his kind offer, said, “My dear Miss Dombey, are you sure you can remember no one whom your good Papa—to whom I beg you to present the best compliments of myself and Lady Skettles when you write—might wish you to know?” it was as natural, perhaps, that her poor head should droop a little, and that her voice should tremble as it softly answered in the negative.

Skettles junior, much stiffened as to his cravat, and sobered down as to his spirits, was at home for the holidays, and appeared to feel himself aggrieved by the solicitude of his excellent mother that he should be attentive to Florence. Another and a deeper injury under which the soul of young Barnet chafed, was the company of Doctor and Mrs. Blimber, who had been invited on a visit to the parental roof-tree, and of whom the young gentleman often said he would have preferred their passing the vacation at Jericho.



"Is there anybody *you* can suggest, now, Doctor Blimber," said Sir Barnet Skettles, turning to that gentleman.

"You are very kind, Sir Barnet," returned Doctor Blimber. "Really I am not aware that there is, in particular. I like to know my fellow men in general, Sir Barnet. What does Terence say? Any one who is the parent of a son is interesting to *me*."

"Has Mrs. Blimber any wish to see any remarkable person?" asked Sir Barnet courteously.

Mrs. Blimber replied, with a sweet smile and a shake of her sky-blue cap, that if Sir Barnet could have made her known to Cicero, she would have troubled him; but such an introduction not being feasible, and she already enjoying the friendship of himself and his amiable lady, and possessing with the Doctor her husband their joint confidence in regard to their dear son—here young Barnet was observed to curl his nose—she asked no more.

Sir Barnet was fain, under these circumstances, to content himself for the time with the company assembled. Florence was glad of that; for she had a study to pursue among them, and it lay too near her heart, and was too precious and momentous, to yield to any other interest.

There were some children staying in the house. Children who were as frank and happy with fathers and with mothers as those rosy faces opposite home. Children who had no restraint upon their love, and freely showed it. Florence sought to learn their secret; sought to find out what it was she had missed; what simple art they knew, and she knew not; how she could be taught by them to show her father that she loved him, and to win his love again.

Many a day did Florence thoughtfully observe these children. On many a bright morning did she leave her bed when the glorious sun rose, and walking up and down upon the river's bank, before any one in the house was stirring, look up at the windows of their rooms, and think of them, asleep, so gently tended and affectionately thought of. Florence would feel more lonely then, than in the great house all alone; and would think sometimes that she was better there than here, and that there was greater peace in hiding herself than in mingling with others of her age, and finding how unlike them all she was. But attentive to her study, though it touched her to the quick at every little leaf she turned in the hard book, Florence remained among them, and tried, with patient hope, to gain the knowledge that she wearied for.

Ah! how to gain it! how to know the charm in its beginning! There were daughters here, who rose up in the morning, and lay down to rest at night, possessed of fathers' hearts already. They had no repulse to overcome, no coldness to dread, no frown to smooth away. As the morning advanced, and the windows opened one by one, and the dew began to dry upon the flowers and grass, and youthful feet began to move upon the lawn, Florence, glancing round at the bright faces, thought what was there she could learn from these children? It was too late to learn from them; each could approach her father fearlessly, and put up her lips to meet the ready kiss, and wind her arm about the neck that bent down to caress her. *She* could not begin by being so bold. Oh! could it be that there was less and less hope as she studied more and more!

She remembered well, that even the old woman who had robbed her when a little child—whose image and whose house, and all she had said and done, were stamped upon her recollection, with the enduring sharpness of a fearful impression made at that early period of life—had spoken fondly of her daughter, and how terribly even she had cried out in the pain of hopeless separation from her child. But her own mother, she would think again, when she recalled this, had loved her well. Then, sometimes, when her thoughts reverted swiftly to the void between herself and her father, Florence would tremble, and the tears would start upon her face, as she pictured to herself her mother living on, and coming also to dislike her, because of her wanting the unknown grace that should conciliate that father naturally, and had never done so from her cradle. She knew that this imagination did wrong to her mother's memory, and had no truth in it, or base to rest upon; and yet she tried so hard to justify him, and to find the whole blame in herself, that she could not resist its passing, like a wild cloud, through the distance of her mind.

There came among the other visitors, soon after Florence, one beautiful girl, three or four years younger than she, who was an orphan child, and who was accompanied by her aunt, a grey-haired lady, who spoke much to Florence, and who greatly liked (but that they all did) to hear her sing of an evening, and would always sit near her at that time, with motherly interest. They had only been two days in the house, when Florence, being in an arbour in the garden one warm morning, musingly observant of a youthful group upon the turf, through some intervening boughs, and wreathing flowers for the head of one little creature among them who was the pet and plaything of the rest, heard this same lady and her niece, in pacing up and down a sheltered nook close by, speak of herself.

"Is Florence an orphan like me, aunt?" said the child.

"No, my love. She has no mother, but her father is living."

"Is she in mourning for her poor mamma now?" inquired the child, quickly.

"No; for her only brother."

"Has she no other brother?"

"None."

"No sister?"

"None."

"I am very, very sorry!" said the little girl.

As they stopped soon afterwards to watch some boats, and had been silent in the meantime, Florence, who had risen when she heard her name, and had gathered up her flowers to go and meet them, that they might know of her being within hearing, resumed her seat and work, expecting to hear no more; but the conversation recommenced next moment.

"Florence is a favourite with every one here, and deserves to be, I am sure," said the child, earnestly. "Where is her papa?"

The aunt replied, after a moment's pause, that she did not know. Her tone of voice arrested Florence, who had started from her seat again; and held her fastened to the spot, with her work hastily caught up to her bosom, and her two hands saving it from being scattered on the ground.



"He is in England I hope, aunt?" said the child.

"I believe so. Yes; I know he is, indeed."

"Has he ever been here?"

"I believe not. No."

"Is he coming here to see her?"

"I believe not."

"Is he lame, or blind, or ill, aunt?" asked the child.

The flowers that Florence held to her breast began to fall when she heard those words, so wonderingly spoken. She held them closer; and her face hung down upon them.

"Kate," said the lady, after another moment of silence, "I will tell you the whole truth about Florence as I have heard it, and believe it to be. Tell no one else, my dear, because it may be little known here, and your doing so would give her pain."

"I never will!" exclaimed the child.

"I know you never will," returned the lady. "I can trust you as myself. I fear then, Kate, that Florence's father cares little for her, very seldom sees her, never was kind to her in her life, and now quite shuns her and avoids her. She would love him dearly if he would suffer her, but he will not—though for no fault of her's; and she is greatly to be loved and pitied by all gentle hearts."

More of the flowers that Florence held, fell scattering on the ground; those that remained were wet, but not with dew; and her face dropped upon her laden hands.

"Poor Florence! Dear, good Florence!" cried the child.

"Do you know why I have told you this, Kate?" said the lady.

"That I may be very kind to her, and take great care to try to please her. Is that the reason, aunt?"

"Partly," said the lady, "but not all. Though we see her so cheerful; with a pleasant smile for every one; ready to oblige us all, and bearing her part in every amusement here: she can hardly be quite happy, do you think she can, Kate?"

"I am afraid not," said the little girl.

"And you can understand," pursued the lady, "why her observation of children who have parents who are fond of them, and proud of them—like many here, just now—should make her sorrowful in secret?"

"Yes, dear aunt," said the child, "I understand that very well. Poor Florence!"

More flowers strayed upon the ground, and those she yet held to her breast trembled as if a wintry wind were rustling them.

"My Kate," said the lady, whose voice was serious, but very calm and sweet, and had so impressed Florence from the first moment of her hearing it, "Of all the youthful people here, you are her natural and harmless friend; you have not the innocent means, that happier children have"—

"There are none happier, aunt!" exclaimed the child, who seemed to cling about her.

—"As other children have, dear Kate, of reminding her of her misfortune. Therefore I would have you, when you try to be her little friend, try all the more for that, and feel that the bereavement you sustained—thank Heaven! before you knew its weight—gives you claim and hold upon poor Florence."

"But I am not without a parent's love, aunt, and I never have been," said the child, "with you."

"However that may be, my dear," returned the lady, "your misfortune is a lighter one than Florence's; for not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is an outcast from a living parent's love."

The flowers were scattered on the ground like dust; the empty hands were spread upon the face; and orphaned Florence, shrinking down upon the ground, wept long and bitterly.

But true of heart and resolute in her good purpose, Florence held to it as her dying mother held by her upon the day that gave Paul life. He did not know how much she loved him. However long the time in coming, and however slow the interval, she must try to bring that knowledge to her father's heart one day or other. Meantime she must be careful in no thoughtless word, or look, or burst of feeling awakened by any chance circumstance, to complain against him, or to give occasion for these whispers to his prejudice.

Even in the response she made the orphan child, to whom she was attracted strongly, and whom she had such occasion to remember, Florence was mindful of him. If she singled her out too plainly (Florence thought) from among the rest, she would confirm—in one mind certainly: perhaps in more—the belief that he was cruel and unnatural. Her own delight was no set-off to this. What she had overheard was a reason, not for soothing herself, but for saving him; and Florence did it, in pursuance of the study of her heart.

She did so always. If a book were read aloud, and there were anything in the story that pointed at an unkind father, she was in pain for their application of it to him; not for herself. So with any trifle of an interlude that was acted, or picture that was shown, or game that was played, among them. The occasions for such tenderness towards him were so many, that her mind misgave her often, it would indeed be better to go back to the old house, and live again within the shadow of its dull walls, undisturbed. How few who saw sweet Florence, in her spring of womanhood, the modest little queen of those small revels, imagined what a load of sacred care lay heavy in her breast! How few of those who stiffened in her father's freezing atmosphere, suspected what a heap of fiery coals was piled upon his head!

Florence pursued her study patiently, and, failing to acquire the secret of the nameless grace she sought, among the youthful company who were assembled in the house, often walked out alone, in the early morning, among the children of the poor. But still she found them all too far advanced to learn from. They had won their household places long ago, and did not stand without, as she did, with a bar across the door.

There was one man whom she several times observed at work very early, and often with a girl of about her own age seated near him. He was a very poor man, who seemed to have no regular employment, but now went roaming about the banks of the river when the tide was low, looking out for bits and scraps in the mud; and now worked at the unpromising little patch of garden-ground before his cottage; and now tinkered up a miserable old boat that belonged to him; or did some job



of that kind for a neighbour, as chance occurred. Whatever the man's labour, the girl was never employed; but sat, when she was with him, in a listless, moping state, and idle.

Florence had often wished to speak to this man; yet she had never taken courage to do so, as he made no movement towards her. But one morning when she happened to come upon him suddenly, from a by-path among some pollard willows which terminated in the little shelving piece of stony ground that lay between his dwelling and the water, where he was bending over a fire he had made to caulk the old boat which was lying bottom upwards, close by, he raised his head at the sound of her footstep, and gave her Good morning.

"Good morning," said Florence, approaching nearer, "you are at work early."

"I'd be glad to be often at work earlier, Miss, if I had work to do."

"Is it so hard to get?" asked Florence.

"I find it so," replied the man.

Florence glanced to where the girl was sitting, drawn together, with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands, and said:

"Is that your daughter?"

He raised his head quickly, and looking towards the girl with a brightened face, nodded to her, and said "Yes." Florence looked towards her too, and gave her a kind salutation; the girl muttered something in return, ungraciously and sullenly.

"Is she in want of employment also?" said Florence.

The man shook his head. "No, Miss," he said. "I work for both."

"Are there only you two, then?" inquired Florence.

"Only us two," said the man. "Her mother has been dead these ten year. Martha!" (he lifted up his head again, and whistled to her)

"Won't you say a word to the pretty young lady?"

The girl made an impatient gesture with her cowering shoulders, and turned her head another way. Ugly, mis-shapen, peevish, ill-conditioned, ragged, dirty—but beloved! Oh, yes! Florence had seen her father's look towards her, and she knew whose look it had no likeness to.

"I'm afraid she's worse this morning, my poor girl!" said the man, suspending his work, and contemplating his ill-favoured child, with a compassion that was the more tender for being rough.

"She is ill, then!" said Florence.

The man drew a deep sigh. "I don't believe my Martha's had five short days' good health," he answered, looking at her still, "in as many long years."

"Aye! and more than that, John," said a neighbour, who had come down to help him with the boat.

"More than that, you say, do you?" cried the other, pushing back his battered hat, and drawing his hand across his forehead. "Very like. It seems a long, long time."

"And the more the time," pursued the neighbour, "the more you've favoured and humoured her, John, 'till she's got to be a burden to herself, and everybody else."

"Not to me," said her father, falling to his work again. "Not to me."

Florence could feel—who better?—how truly he spoke. She drew a

little closer to him, and would have been glad to touch his rugged hand, and thank him for his goodness to the miserable object that he looked upon with eyes so different from any other man's.

"Who would favour my poor girl—to call it favouring—if *I* didn't?" said the father.

"Aye, aye," cried the neighbour. "In reason, John. But you! You rob yourself to give to her. You bind yourself hand and foot on her account. You make your life miserable along of her. And what does *she* care! You don't believe she knows it?"

The father lifted up his head again, and whistled to her. Martha made the same impatient gesture with her crouching shoulders, in reply; and he was glad and happy.

"Only for that, Miss," said the neighbour, with a smile, in which there was more of secret sympathy than he expressed; "only to get that, he never lets her out of his sight!"

"Because the day 'll come, and has been coming a long while," observed the other, bending low over his work, "when to get half as much from that unfort'nate child of mine—to get the trembling of a finger, or the waving of a hair—would be to raise the dead."

Florence softly put some money near his hand on the old boat, and left him.

And now Florence began to think, if she were to fall ill, if she were to fade like her dear brother, would he then know that she had loved him; would she then grow dear to him; would he come to her bedside, when she was weak and dim of sight, and take her into his embrace, and cancel all the past? Would he so forgive her, in that changed condition, for not having been able to lay open her childish heart to him, as to make it easy to relate with what emotions she had gone out of his room that night; what she had meant to say if she had had the courage; and how she had endeavoured, afterwards, to learn the way she never knew in infancy?

Yes, she thought if she were dying, he would relent. She thought, that if she lay, serene and not unwilling to depart, upon the bed that was curtained round with recollections of their darling boy, he would be touched home, and would say, "Dear Florence, live for me, and we will love each other as we might have done, and be as happy as we might have been these many years!" She thought that if she heard such words from him, and had her arms clasped round him, she could answer with a smile, "It is too late for anything but this; I never could be happier, dear father!" and so leave him, with a blessing on her lips.

The golden water she remembered on the wall, appeared to Florence, in the light of such reflections, only as a current flowing on to rest, and to a region where the dear ones, gone before, were waiting, hand in hand; and often when she looked upon the darker river rippling at her feet, she thought with awful wonder, but not terror, of that river which her brother had so often said was bearing him away.

The father and his sick daughter were yet fresh in Florence's mind, and, indeed, that incident was not a week old, when Sir Barnet and his lady going out walking in the lanes one afternoon, proposed to her to bear them company. Florence readily consenting, Lady Skettles ordered out young Barnet as a matter of course. For nothing delighted Lady Skettles so much, as beholding her eldest son with Florence on his arm.



Barnet, to say the truth, appeared to entertain an opposite sentiment on the subject, and on such occasions frequently expressed himself audibly, though indefinitely, in reference to "a parcel of girls." As it was not easy to ruffle her sweet temper, however, Florence generally reconciled the young gentleman to his fate after a few minutes, and they strolled on amicably: Lady Skettles and Sir Barnet following, in a state of perfect complacency and high gratification.

This was the order of procedure on the afternoon in question; and Florence had almost succeeded in overruling the present objections of Skettles junior to his destiny, when a gentleman on horseback came riding by, looked at them earnestly as he passed, drew in his rein, wheeled round, and came riding back again, hat in hand.

The gentleman had looked particularly at Florence; and when the little party stopped, on his riding back, he bowed to her before saluting Sir Barnet and his lady. Florence had no remembrance of having ever seen him, but she started involuntarily when he came near her, and drew back.

"My horse is perfectly quiet, I assure you," said the gentleman.

It was not that, but something in the gentleman himself—Florence could not have said what—that made her recoil as if she had been stung.

"I have the honour to address Miss Dombey, I believe?" said the gentleman, with a most persuasive smile. On Florence inclining her head, he added, "My name is Carker. I can hardly hope to be remembered by Miss Dombey, except by name. Carker."

Florence, sensible of a strange inclination to shiver, though the day was hot, presented him to her host and hostess; by whom he was very graciously received.

"I beg pardon," said Mr. Carker, "a thousand times! But I am going down to-morrow morning to Mr. Dombey, at Leamington, and if Miss Dombey can intrust me with any commission, need I say how *very* happy I shall be?"

Sir Barnet immediately divining that Florence would desire to write a letter to her father, proposed to return, and besought Mr. Carker to come home and dine in his riding gear. Mr. Carker had the misfortune to be engaged to dinner, but if Miss Dombey wished to write, nothing would delight him more than to accompany them back, and to be her faithful slave in waiting as long as she pleased. As he said this with his widest smile, and bent down close to her to pat his horse's neck, Florence, meeting his eyes, saw, rather than heard him say, "There is no news of the ship!"

Confused, frightened, shrinking from him, and not even sure that he had said those words, for he seemed to have shown them to her in some extraordinary manner through his smile, instead of uttering them, Florence faintly said that she was obliged to him, but she would not write; she had nothing to say.

"Nothing to send, Miss Dombey?" said the man of teeth.

"Nothing," said Florence, "but my—but my dear love—if you please."

Disturbed as Florence was, she raised her eyes to his face with an imploring and expressive look, that plainly besought him, if he knew—which he as plainly did—that any message between her and her father

was an uncommon charge, but that one most of all, to spare her. Mr. Carker smiled and bowed low, and being charged by Sir Barnet with the best compliments of himself and Lady Skettles, took his leave, and rode away: leaving a favourable impression on that worthy couple. Florence was seized with such a shudder as he went, that Sir Barnet, adopting the popular superstition, supposed somebody was passing over her grave. Mr. Carker, turning a corner, on the instant, looked back, and bowed, and disappeared, as if he rode off to the churchyard, straight, to do it.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### STRANGE NEWS OF UNCLE SOL.

CAPTAIN CUTTLE, though no sluggard, did not turn out so early on the morning after he had seen Sol Gills, through the shop-window, writing in the parlour, with the Midshipman upon the counter, and Rob the Grinder making up his bed below it, but that the clocks struck six as he raised himself on his elbow, and took a survey of his little chamber. The Captain's eyes must have done severe duty, if he usually opened them as wide on awaking as he did that morning; and were but roughly rewarded for their vigilance, if he generally rubbed them half as hard. But the occasion was no common one, for Rob the Grinder had certainly never stood in the doorway of Captain Cuttle's bed-room before, and in it he stood then, panting at the Captain, with a flushed and touzled air of Bed about him, that greatly heightened both his colour and expression.

"Holloa!" roared the Captain. "What's the matter?"

Before Rob could stammer a word in answer, Captain Cuttle turned out, all in a heap, and covered the boy's mouth with his hand.

"Steady my lad," said the Captain, "don't ye speak a word to me as yet!"

The Captain, looking at his visitor in great consternation, gently shouldered him into the next room, after laying this injunction upon him; and disappearing for a few moments, forthwith returned in the blue suit. Holding up his hand in token of the injunction not yet being taken off, Captain Cuttle walked up to the cupboard, and poured himself out a dram; a counterpart of which he handed to the messenger. The Captain then stood himself up in a corner, against the wall, as if to forestal the possibility of being knocked backwards by the communication that was to be made to him; and having swallowed his liquor, with his eyes fixed on the messenger, and his face as pale as his face could be, requested him to "heave a-head."

"Do you mean, tell you, Captain?" asked Rob, who had been greatly impressed by these precautions.

"Aye!" said the Captain.

"Well, sir," said Rob, "I aint got much to tell. But look here!"

Rob produced a bundle of keys. The Captain surveyed them, remained in his corner, and surveyed the messenger.

"And look here!" pursued Rob.



The boy produced a sealed packet, which Captain Cuttle stared at as he had stared at the keys.

"When I woke this morning, Captain," said Rob, "which was about a quarter after five, I found these on my pillow. The shop-door was unbolted and unlocked, and Mr. Gills gone."

"Gone!" roared the Captain.

"Flowed, sir," returned Rob.

The Captain's voice was so tremendous, and he came out of his corner with such way on him, that Rob retreated before him into another corner: holding out the keys and packet, to prevent himself from being run down.

"For Captain Cuttle, sir," cried Rob, "is on the keys, and on the packet too. Upon my word and honour, Captain Cuttle, I don't know anything more about it. I wish I may die if I do! Here's a situation for a lad that's just got a situation," cried the unfortunate Grinder, screwing his cuff into his face: "his master bolted with his place, and him blamed for it!"

These lamentations had reference to Captain Cuttle's gaze, or rather glare, which was full of vague suspicions, threatenings, and denunciations. Taking the proffered packet from his hand, the Captain opened it, and read as follows:

"My dear Ned Cuttle. Enclosed is my Will!" The Captain turned it over, with a doubtful look—"and Testament.—Where's the Testament?" said the Captain, instantly impeaching the ill-fated Grinder. "What have you done with that, my lad?"

"I never see it," whimpered Rob. "Don't keep on suspecting an innocent lad, Captain. I never touched the Testament."

Captain Cuttle shook his head, implying that somebody must be made answerable for it; and gravely proceeded:

"Which don't break open for a year, or until you have decisive intelligence of my dear Walter, who is dear to you, Ned, too, I am sure." The Captain paused and shook his head in some emotion; then, as a re-establishment of his dignity in this trying position, looked with exceeding sternness at the Grinder. "If you should never hear of me, or see me more, Ned, remember an old friend as he will remember you to the last—kindly; and at least until the period I have mentioned has expired, keep a home in the old place for Walter. There are no debts, the loan from Dombey's house is paid off, and all my keys I send with this. Keep this quiet, and make no inquiry for me; it is useless. So no more, dear Ned, from your true friend, Solomon Gills." The Captain took a long breath, and then read these words, written below: "'The boy Rob, well recommended, as I told you, from Dombey's house. If all else should come to the hammer, take care, Ned, of the little Midshipman.'"

To convey to posterity any idea of the manner in which the Captain, after turning this letter over and over, and reading it a score of times, sat down in his chair, and held a court-martial on the subject in his own mind, would require the united genius of all the great men, who, discarding their own untoward days, have determined to go down to posterity, and have never got there. At first the Captain was too much confounded and distressed to think of anything but the letter itself; and even when his thoughts began to glance upon the various attendant facts, they might,

perhaps, as well have occupied themselves with their former theme, for any light they reflected on them. In this state of mind, Captain Cuttle having the Grinder before the court, and no one else, found it a great relief to decide, generally, that he was an object of suspicion: which the Captain so clearly expressed in his visage, that Rob remonstrated.

"Oh, don't, Captain!" cried the Grinder. "I wonder how you can! what have I done to be looked at, like that."

"My lad," said Captain Cuttle, "don't you sing out afore you're hurt. And don't you commit yourself, whatever you do."

"I haven't been and committed nothing, Captain!" answered Rob.

"Keep her free, then," said the Captain, impressively, "and ride easy."

With a deep sense of the responsibility imposed upon him, and the necessity of thoroughly fathoming this mysterious affair, as became a man in his relations with the parties, Captain Cuttle resolved to go down and examine the premises, and to keep the Grinder with him. Considering that youth as under arrest at present, the Captain was in some doubt whether it might not be expedient to handcuff him, or tie his ankles together, or attach a weight to his legs, but not being clear as to the legality of such formalities, the Captain decided merely to hold him by the shoulder all the way, and knock him down if he made any objection.

However, he made none, and consequently got to the Instrument-maker's house without being placed under any more stringent restraint. As the shutters were not yet taken down, the Captain's first care was to have the shop opened; and when the daylight was freely admitted, he proceeded, with its aid, to further investigation.

The Captain's first care was to establish himself in a chair in the shop, as President of the solemn tribunal that was sitting within him; and to require Rob to lie down in his bed under the counter, show exactly where he discovered the keys and packet when he awoke, how he found the door when he went to try it, how he started off to Brig Place—cautiously preventing the latter imitation from being carried farther than the threshold—and so on to the end of the chapter. When all this had been done several times, the Captain shook his head and seemed to think the matter had a bad look.

Next, the Captain, with some indistinct idea of finding a body, instituted a strict search over the whole house; groping in the cellars with a lighted candle, thrusting his hook behind doors, bringing his head into violent contact with beams, and covering himself with cobwebs. Mounting up to the old man's bed-room, they found that he had not been in bed on the previous night, but had merely lain down on the coverlet, as was evident from the impression yet remaining there.

"And I think, Captain," said Rob, looking round the room, "that when Mr. Gills was going in and out so often, these last few days, he was taking little things away, piecemeal, not to attract attention."

"Aye!" said the Captain, mysteriously. "Why so, my lad?"

"Why," returned Rob, looking about, "I don't see his shaving tackle. Nor his brushes, Captain. Nor no shirts. Nor yet his shoes."

As each of these articles was mentioned, Captain Cuttle took particular notice of the corresponding department of the Grinder, lest he should appear to have been in recent use, or should prove to be in pre-



sent possession thereof. But Rob had no occasion to shave, certainly was not brushed, and wore the clothes he had worn for a long time past, beyond all possibility of mistake.

"And what should you say" said the Captain—"not committing yourself—about his time of sheering off? Hey?"

"Why, I think, Captain," returned Rob, "that he must have gone pretty soon after I began to snore."

"What o'clock was that?" said the Captain, prepared to be very particular about the exact time.

"How can I tell, Captain!" answered Rob. "I only know that I'm a heavy sleeper at first, and a light one towards morning; and if Mr. Gills had come through the shop near daybreak, though ever so much on tip-toe, I'm pretty sure I should have heard him shut the door at all events."

On mature consideration of this evidence, Captain Cuttle began to think that the Instrument-maker must have vanished of his own accord; to which logical conclusion he was assisted by the letter addressed to himself, which, as being unquestionably in the old man's hand-writing, would seem, with no great forcing, to bear the construction, that he arranged of his own will, to go, and so went. The Captain had next to consider where and why? and as there was no way whatsoever that he saw to the solution of the first difficulty, he confined his meditations to the second.

Remembering the old man's curious manner, and the farewell he had taken of him: unaccountably fervent at the time, but quite intelligible now: a terrible apprehension strengthened on the Captain, that, overpowered by his anxieties and regrets for Walter, he had been driven to commit suicide. Unequal to the wear and tear of daily life, as he had often professed himself to be, and shaken as he no doubt was by the uncertainty and deferred hope he had undergone, it seemed no violently strained misgiving, but only too probable.

Free from debt, and with no fear for his personal liberty, or the seizure of his goods, what else but such a state of madness could have hurried him away alone and secretly? As to his carrying some apparel with him, if he had really done so—and they were not even sure of that—he might have done so, the Captain argued, to prevent inquiry, to distract attention from his probable fate, or to ease the very mind that was now revolving all these possibilities. Such, reduced into plain language, and condensed within a small compass, was the final result and substance of Captain Cuttle's deliberations; which took a long time to arrive at this pass, and were, like some more public deliberations, very discursive and disorderly.

Dejected and despondent in the extreme, Captain Cuttle felt it just to release Rob from the arrest in which he had placed him, and to enlarge him, subject to a kind of honourable inspection which he still resolved to exercise; and having hired a man, from Brogley the Broker, to sit in the shop during their absence, the Captain, taking Rob with him, issued forth upon a dismal quest after the mortal remains of Solomon Gills.

Not a station-house, or bone-house, or work-house in the metropolis escaped a visitation from the hard glazed hat. Along the wharves, among the shipping, on the bank-side, up the river, down the river, here, there, everywhere, it went gleaming where men were thickest, like the hero's helmet in an epic battle. For a whole week, the Captain read of all the

found and missing people in all the newspapers and handbills, and went forth on expeditions at all hours of the day to identify Solomon Gills, in poor little ship-boys who had fallen overboard, and in tall foreigners with dark beards who had taken poison—"to make sure," Captain Cuttle said, "that it warn't him." It is a sure thing that it never was, and that the good Captain had no other satisfaction.

Captain Cuttle at last abandoned these attempts as hopeless, and set himself to consider what was to be done next. After several new perusals of his poor friend's letter, he considered that the maintenance of "a home in the old place for Walter" was the primary duty imposed upon him. Therefore, the Captain's decision was, that he would keep house on the premises of Solomon Gills himself, and would go into the instrument business, and see what came of it.

But as this step involved the relinquishment of his apartments at Mrs. Mac Stinger's, and he knew that resolute woman would never hear of his deserting them, the Captain took the desperate determination of running away.

"Now, look ye here, my lad," said the Captain to Rob, when he had matured this notable scheme, "to-morrow, I shan't be found in this here roadstead till night—not till arter midnight p'raps. But you keep watch till you hear me knock, and the moment you do, turn-to, and open the door."

"Very good, Captain," said Rob.

"You'll continue to be rated on this here books," pursued the Captain condescendingly, "and I don't say but what you may get promotion, if you and me should pull together with a will. But the moment you hear me knock to-morrow night, whatever time it is, turn-to and show yourself smart with the door."

"I'll be sure to do it, Captain," replied Rob.

"Because you understand," resumed the Captain, coming back again to enforce this charge upon his mind, "there may be, for anything I can say, a chase; and I might be took while I was waiting, if you didn't show yourself smart with the door."

Rob again assured the Captain that he would be prompt and wakeful; and the Captain having made this prudent arrangement, went home to Mrs. Mac Stinger's for the last time.

The sense the Captain had of its being the last time, and of the awful purpose hidden beneath his blue waistcoat, inspired him with such a mortal dread of Mrs. Mac Stinger, that the sound of that lady's foot downstairs at any time of the day, was sufficient to throw him into a fit of trembling. It fell out, too, that Mrs. Mac Stinger was in a charming temper—mild and placid as a house-lamb; and Captain Cuttle's conscience suffered terrible twinges, when she came up to inquire if she could cook him nothing for his dinner.

"A nice small kidney-pudding now, Cap'en Cuttle," said his landlady: "or a sheep's heart. Don't mind *my* trouble."

"No thank 'ee, Ma'am," returned the Captain.

"Have a roast fowl," said Mrs. Mac Stinger, "with a bit of weal stuffing and some egg sauce. Come, Cap'en Cuttle! Give yourself a little treat!"

"No thank 'ee, Ma'am," returned the Captain very humbly.



"I'm sure you're out of sorts, and want to be stimulated," said Mrs. Mac Stinger. "Why not have, for once in a way, a bottle of sherry wine?"

"Well Ma'am," rejoined the Captain, "if you'd be so good as take a glass or two, I think I would try that. Would you do me the favour, Ma'am," said the Captain, torn to pieces by his conscience, "to accept a quarter's rent a-head?"

"And why so, Cap'en Cuttle?" retorted Mrs. Mac Stinger—sharply, as the Captain thought.

The Captain was frightened to death. "If you would Ma'am," he said with submission, "it would oblige me. I can't keep my money very well. It pays itself out. I should take it kind if you'd comply."

"Well, Cap'en Cuttle," said the unconscious Mac Stinger, rubbing her hands, "you can do as you please. It's not for me, with my family, to refuse, no more than it is to ask."

"And would you, Ma'am," said the Captain, taking down the tin canister in which he kept his cash, from the top-shelf of the cupboard, "be so good as offer eighteen-pence a-piece to the little family all round? If you could make it convenient, Ma'am, to pass the word presently for them children to come for'ard, in a body, I should be glad to see 'em."

These innocent Mac Stingers were so many daggers to the Captain's breast; when they appeared in a swarm, and tore at him with the confiding trustfulness he so little deserved. The eye of Alexander Mac Stinger, who had been his favourite, was insupportable to the Captain; the voice of Juliana Mac Stinger, who was the picture of her mother, made a coward of him.

Captain Cuttle kept up appearances, nevertheless, tolerably well, and for an hour or two was very hardly used and roughly handled by the young Mac Stingers: who in their childish frolics, did a little damage also to the glazed hat, by sitting in it, two at a time, as in a nest, and drumming on the inside of the crown with their shoes. At length the Captain sorrowfully dismissed them: taking leave of these cherubs with the poignant remorse and grief of a man who was going to execution.

In the silence of night, the Captain packed up his heavier property in a chest, which he locked, intending to leave it there, in all probability for ever, but on the forlorn chance of one day finding a man sufficiently bold and desperate to come and ask for it. Of his lighter necessities, the Captain made a bundle; and disposed his plate about his person, ready for flight. At the hour of midnight, when Brig Place was buried in slumber, and Mrs. Mac Stinger was lulled in sweet oblivion, with her infants around her, the guilty Captain, stealing down on tiptoe, in the dark, opened the door, closed it softly after him, and took to his heels.

Pursued by the image of Mrs. Mac Stinger springing out of bed, and, regardless of costume, following and bringing him back; pursued also by a consciousness of his enormous crime; Captain Cuttle held on at a great pace, and allowed no grass to grow under his feet, between Brig Place and the Instrument-maker's door. It opened when he knocked—for Rob was on the watch—and when it was bolted and locked behind him, Captain Cuttle felt comparatively safe.

"Whew!" cried the Captain, looking round him, "It's a breather!"

"Nothing the matter, is there, Captain?" cried the gaping Rob.

"No, no!" said Captain Cuttle, after changing colour, and listening to a passing footstep in the street. "But mind ye, my lad; if any lady, except either of them two as you see t'other day, ever comes and asks for Cap'en Cuttle, be sure to report no person of that name known, nor never heard of here; observe them orders, will you?"

"I'll take care, Captain," returned Rob.

"You might say—if you liked," hesitated the Captain, "that you'd read in the paper that a Cap'en of that name was gone to Australia, emigrating, along with a whole ship's complement of people as had all sworn never to come back no more."

Rob nodded his understanding of these instructions; and Captain Cuttle promising to make a man of him if he obeyed orders, dismissed him, yawning, to his bed under the counter, and went aloft to the chamber of Solomon Gills.

What the Captain suffered next day, whenever a bonnet passed, or how often he darted out of the shop to elude imaginary Mac Stingers, and sought safety in the attic, cannot be told. But to avoid the fatigues attendant on this means of self preservation, the Captain curtained the glass door of communication between the shop and parlour, on the inside; fitted a key to it from the bunch that had been sent to him; and cut a small hole of espial in the wall. The advantage of this fortification is obvious. On a bonnet appearing, the Captain instantly slipped into his garrison, locked himself up, and took a secret observation of the enemy. Finding it a false alarm, the Captain instantly slipped out again. And the bonnets in the street were so very numerous, and alarms were so inseparable from their appearance, that the Captain was almost incessantly slipping in and out all day long.

Captain Cuttle found time, however, in the midst of this fatiguing service to inspect the stock; in connexion with which he had the general idea (very laborious to Rob) that too much friction could not be bestowed upon it, and that it could not be made too bright. He also ticketed a few attractive looking articles at a venture, at prices ranging from ten shillings to fifty pounds, and exposed them in the window to the great astonishment of the public.

After effecting these improvements, Captain Cuttle, surrounded by the instruments, began to feel scientific: and looked up at the stars at night, through the skylight, when he was smoking his pipe in the little back parlour before going to bed, as if he had established a kind of property in them. As a tradesmen in the city, too, he began to have an interest in the Lord Mayor, and the Sheriffs, and in Public Companies; and felt bound to read the quotations of the Funds every day, though he was unable to make out, on any principle of navigation, what the figures meant, and could have very well dispensed with the fractions. Florence, the Captain waited on, with his strange news of Uncle Sol, immediately after taking possession of the Midshipman; but she was away from home. So the Captain sat himself down in his altered station of life, with no company but Rob the Grinder; and losing count of time, as men do when great changes come upon them, thought musingly of Walter, and of Solomon Gills, and even of Mrs. Mac Stinger herself, as among the things that had been.



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